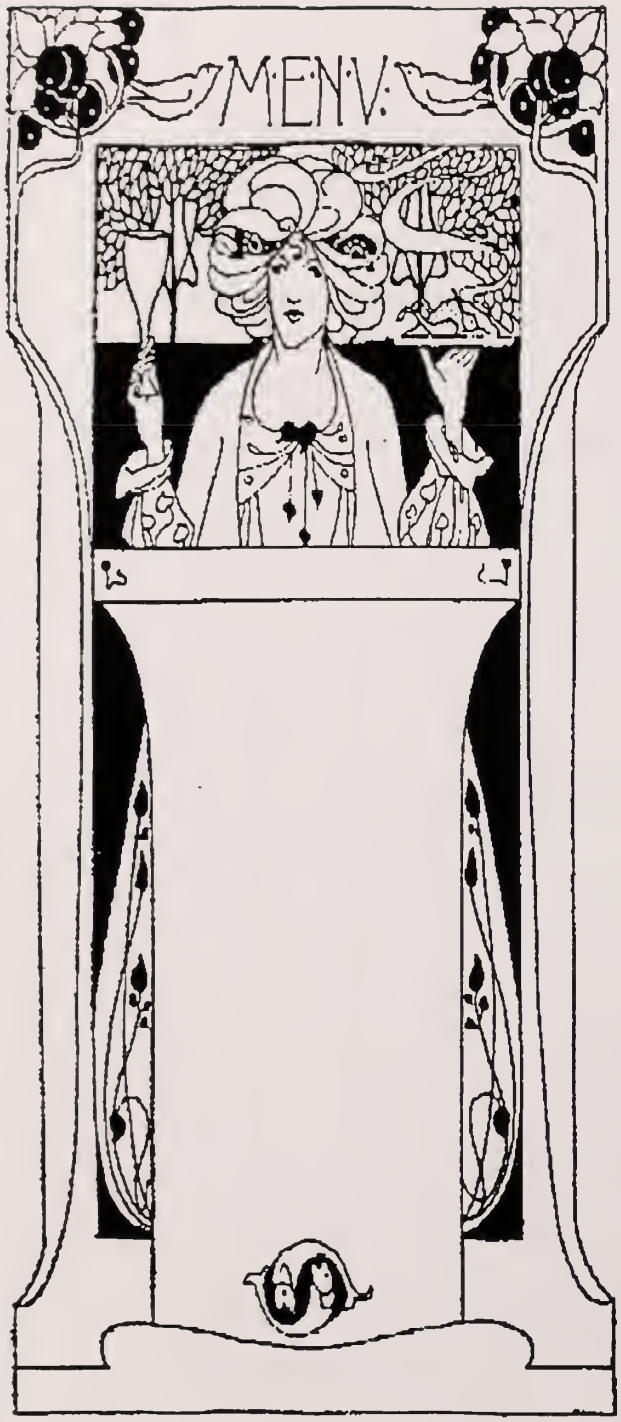
Writers In Progress

Fifth Anniversary Edition 1998-1999

writers in progress



Introduction

Faith Benedetti iv

Place

Hicham Samar ✻ "The Palace of All the Passions". 1
Marion Clancy ✻ "The Roulette Table". 3
Crispin Conklin ✻ "The Lake Trail". 4

Person

Zakia Francis ✻ "My Lovely Dad" 5
Kisys Bernabel ✻ "A Practical Mother" 7
Anny Bernabel ✻ "Papy" 9

Narrative

Baki Ceylan ✻ "Sailing in the Hurricane". 12
Therese Jbeily ✻ "What Have I Done
to Deserve This?" 15
Akil Verisha ✻ "The Day of Revolution". 17
Andrea Acosta ✻ "Seventh Grade" 20
Cathy Mendonca ✻ "An Evening in the Toy Store" 22

Job

Guillermo Ramos ✻ "The Adventures
of a Cab Driver" 24
Lenny Pichardo ✻ "A New York City Bodega" 26
Anthony Sciosia ✻ "My First Job" 28

Process

Adam Sideri ✻ "Backpacking" 30
Eric O'Neill ✻ "How to Be a Procrastinating Pro". 32
Mike Maki ✻ "Finding a Life Partner in Japan" 33

Music

Paki Phillips ✻ "Music" 35
David Aliperti ✻ "The David's Shower Show". 37
Klara Vajda ✻ "Saving Grace" 39

Thesis

Ricardo Mitchell ✻ "To Be or Not To Be". 41
Olga Marchenko ✻ "War". 43
Mabel Romero ✻ "The Ambiguity of the Church
as a Credible Institution" 45

Introduction

When I first set foot on the Northern Essex campus in 1982, the world that I knew was relatively small. I had lived all of my 17 years in Haverhill, grew up in the same house that my father had grown up in, played with neighbor kids whose families belonged to the neighborhood like mine did. The streets, tenements, backyard clotheslines, churches and corner stores were my landmarks and boundaries, and so the fact that my grandparents had emigrated from Italy seemed impossible legend to me. My understanding of the larger world came from books, but not from experience, and without a context, history, geography, and even my own legacy were simply enjoyable fictions. I loved the family, the house, the neighborhood and the small city that comprised my world, but I felt that there was something more to life, to this existence, than I or any one of us could imagine. I was hungry to learn about the world, and that is why I went to college. Northern Essex was the gateway that I picked, and writing became the way that I made sense of it all.

Eleven years of books, travels, degrees and all manner of life experiences later, I found myself back on the doorstep of NECC, only this time as a teacher of Basic Writing. I returned proudly hoping to give back some of what I learned, thinking that I knew everything about the world and about life. I believed there was nothing more for me to learn at Northern Essex. A famous Buddhist teaching states "When the student is ready, the teacher will arrive." Well, how was I to know that each semester, I would have twenty new teachers?! I was not prepared for the humbling lessons I would learn from the teachers sitting opposite me in the classroom.

When you teach (or are taught) something about writing, the first piece of advice is always to "write what you know." You can't write convincingly about love if you've never experienced it; you can't talk about growing up in the country if you've only lived in the city. And so, in Basic Writing, we ask students to write about their lives— to describe the places and people they love, to share stories about traumas and triumphs, to allow us to see the world through their eyes. We tell them that if they apply themselves, they will not only know much more about writing, but will have learned something more about who they are.

Not only is this true for the individual student, but for everyone in the classroom, and that includes the teacher. *We are all learning together.* When you are brave enough to tell your story to others, to explore in writing what makes you tick, we are all more able to examine our own lives, to figure out what makes us tick! When you write about what you know, it adds to what we all know. The world becomes not something "out there," but something that happens right inside, in front, in back, and to either side of you. And in an area where so many immigrants come to make their lives, the richness and diversity of life experience is astounding. Each semester, the students at Northern Essex bring the world to each other by bringing their lives into the classroom, and by documenting them on paper. Undeniably, this becomes a significant part of the learning.

This edition of *Writers in Progress*, our fifth anniversary edition, is a sampling of the past year's lessons. When you read it, you will know something more about the lives of the students whose seats have been passed on to you. You will learn something more about riding out a hurricane on a ship in the Mediterranean, how taxi drivers handle being behind the wheel for twelve hours, what it looks like in a palace in Spain, how it feels to suddenly understand your parents, and what it's like to wake up one morning and participate in a revolution that changes the course of history. People are born, die, fall in love, weep, work, wonder, muse and remember here, in a beautiful world of sights, sounds, smells, textures

and tastes. And although this is a small volume, the overall message it brings for all of us is this: although our upbringing may have been different, although we may have had radically different cultural, religious or political beliefs, although we may speak different languages, we are all so much the same.

There is a Lakota Sioux proverb used to describe the peaceful state of awareness we can practice when we are looking at all of life. It says, "Now I walk in Beauty. Beauty is before me, Beauty is behind me, above me and below me." My wish is that you will involve yourself in the beauty of these stories, that they may offer you insight and hope, and inspire you to share the beauty of your life through your own words.

— Faith Benedetti
June 1999

The Palace of All the Passions

by Hicham Samar

Spain is one of the most beautiful countries in the world, a country where beauty approaches perfection, and where the touch of the past is felt in every corner. In 1989, I had the chance to visit one of the most emblematic cities in Spain, the living heart of all Andalousia: the imperial city of Grenada.

Historically, Grenada was the capital of Andalousia in the 15th century. The Sultan Palace is one of the most symbolic monuments of the city. It was built to show the greatness of its creators. To make it such a magnificent monument, the Sultan didn't look at expenses; he brought fez mosaic, Atlas Mountains cedar, Italian marble, Middle Eastern leaded glass windows, and Iranian carpets. He united the best artisans and artists of his own time from all over the world.

The sultan chose the location in the place he loved most. It was his secret garden, the thing most resembling heaven, on a hill crowned by a wood that was proudly guarding the city of Grenada.

When you enter the palace, you feel the touch of beauty reigning the corridors and enchanting the visitors, the dedication of the artisans who made the dream a more beautiful reality, and the architectural perfection that stood in the face of the war and of the impartial time. Every inch of this monument is gorged with history and happiness, but also cries and torment.

The big hall was the meeting room where the king could meet the common people and also the princes and ministers representing the other countries of the world. You access this rectangular room from a portal ten feet high and seven feet wide. It is made of hard wood and is decorated with arcs and circles. The doorknob is made of bronze and it takes two men to open it. When you enter the room, you see marble columns carrying the ceiling, which is made of plaster sculpted with geometric forms. At the top of the walls, you can contemplate the art of calligraphy, which is Arabic sentences from the holy Koran sculpted onto the cedar wood. The room has big windows that let the morning sun warm the place with its golden rays. The floor is made of white marble brought from Italy and partially covered by some beautiful red and blue carpets coming from Asbahan. There is a throne in the north side of the room. It is a big chair of fine wood horned with pearls, emeralds, and sapphires. You would be astonished by the rarity of the furniture in such an important part of the palace. But the truth is that most of the masterpieces are in the history museum.

Some people start asking questions when they don't find human statues. The reason for this is in relation to religious beliefs. This characteristic in every Arabic house or palace is another aspect of Islamic architecture. While walking in the corridors, you will be fascinated by the figures made in the mosaic. It is mud forged in the fire, polished, sculpted, and then reunited like a puzzle and used for the ornament of the birds and the columns and the decoration of the fountains. The motifs of birds and mythic animals look so real that you will think that they are alive. The walls are horned by sublime sculpture and designs on plaster, representing images from the hunt and some of the king's glorious battle scenes. The beauty is so intense that you will think that you are in a religious place. You will feel the spirituality all around you.

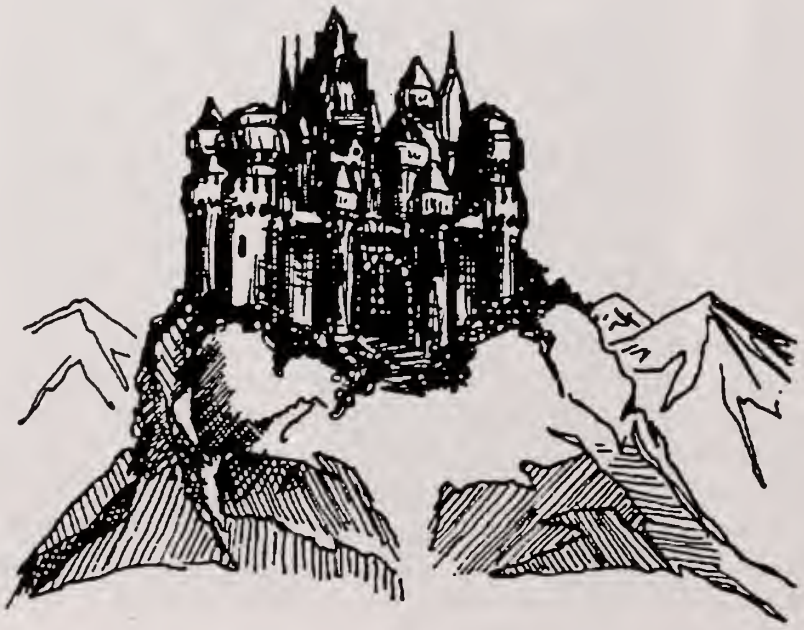
The harem, which is the private aisle of the king's wives and concubines, is one of the most luxurious places in the palace. It is richly decorated with porcelain vases brought from China with motifs of phoenix and dragons. The bed is made of ostrich feathers and covered by a shining silver silk cloth. The room has a big window, which is like a door to a private balcony. From there you can see the beautiful panorama of an interior garden, which marries the beauty of the green and the fluidity of the water coming from a fountain, which represents the heart of the garden.

The garden is the epitome of the Arabic style, which consists of marrying nature with the Arabic art of sculpture and calligraphy. The result is a perfect harmony. One of the most revealing examples of it is an interior garden protected by twelve lions— or what seem to be. The sculptures surrounding the fountain roar when the water shoots out from their mouths. Then the water runs in small canals to irrigate the thirsty flowers and trees. The diverse vegetation is grouped in rectangles, which are divided by the passageways and the small water canals.

The legend says that this place is magical. I believe that this is true because sometimes, when I was walking around, I heard some people whispering. Yet the place is empty. Those aren't ghosts in the wind. However, it gives the place such magic that some people think it has a soul. The palace is like a woman that seduces the visitors and takes their hearts, and feeds their hunger for beauty and perfection.

***

Hicham Samar, a.k.a "the Prince of the Red Moon" (as he always signed his writing at the end), poeticized his way through Basic Writing with Jennie-Rebecca Falcetta in spring 1999. Originally from Fez, Morocco, Hicham plans on a career in engineering and lists as his interests soccer and poetry. Despite his beautifully descriptive essays, 18-year-old Hicham admits, "I felt terrible about writing because I was scared of trying new things," but his Basic Writing experience has made him more comfortable with the composing process.



The Roulette Table

by Marion Clancy

I entered the Excalibur Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada. I could feel my heart beat with the anticipation of finding the secret place where I could take in the action and activities going on around me. The excitement started to build as I took my first step through the revolving door and smelled my first scent of expensive perfume and cologne. A refreshing breeze came from the air conditioning and at the same time the sun beamed its powerful heat on my face. I crossed the room and took my place at the roulette table, which is approximately 12 feet long by 4 feet wide and covered with green felt material. Thirty-six numbers starting from one and ending at thirty-six are printed on the fabric. Every other number is either black or red. The wheel, located at the head of the table, is covered with the same amount of numbers and colors and takes up about 25% of the table.

Voices around me echoed with cheer and laughter. A slot machine lit up and blared with loud bells and whistles as coins fell from it, clanging into the metal hopper. Women walked by wearing long, flowing, silk sequin gowns, high-heeled shoes, hair done up in French twist hair styles and make-up applied with a steady expert hand. Men passed by dressed in formal tuxes, black ties, and polished wingtip shoes and smelling of expensive cologne. The sun was shining through the window as a rainbow appeared on the far right wall. It was created by one of the women's extravagant gowns as the sun's rays caught a glimpse of the metallic fabric. The music coming from the three-member band played just across from where I was sitting, wailing out the blues as passersby swayed and clapped to the thunderous sounds of the band. Cocktail waitresses in medieval style uniforms walked by offering beer, wine and cigarettes.

My heart raced with excitement of everything going on. Each player exchanged cash for specific colored gaming chips. The dealer took the money, dropping it with expertise into the safe. "Please place your bets," the dealer announced in a distinctive Australian accent. Each player sat on the edge of his stool to reach the number or color of choice. Multi-colored chips covered most of the 36 numbers. The dealer picked up the plastic white ball and in one swift motion spun it counter clockwise. At the same time, he gave the wheel a quick spin in a clockwise direction. Men and women hurried with graceful frenzy to place their last and final bets.

The ball whirled around the outside of the large metal wheel. The dealer, signaling in slow motion, announced, "No more bets, please," as he waved his hand and arm in a horizontal position across the table. The crowd was quiet for approximately 10 seconds as the ball slowed and vibrated as it prepared to come to a final resting place. It came to a final stop and found its place in one of the numbered nooks. The table howled with excitement and eagerness as the dealer paid off the winners. The next game was about to begin as the dealer announced once again, "Place your bets."

It was time for me to leave. I stood up and walked back across the room towards the exit. A new band was playing the top 40's. Elegant men and women resumed their betting. The slot machines seemed a little less crowded; however, people's laughter seemed more noticeable. The sun started to set, but the desert was just as hot as when I had entered four hours earlier. I approached the exit to the Excalibur Hotel and Casino, turned to face the room, and wondered when I would be able to return to my secret place at the roulette table and experience the thrill of placing my first bet.

***

Marion Clancy, 30, was a student of Joanna Fortna's in fall '98. Before enrolling in Basic Writing, Marion did not enjoy writing, but now she says, "I enjoy writing. It is a way for me to get out what I am feeling."

The Lake Trail
by Crispin Conklin

I was somehow, someway, closer to God. Sitting on a rock, overlooking a majestic lake, the orange tips of the never-ending rippled waves danced and shimmered in the sun. The cresting charmers hitting the shore at my feet seemed to chant, "Come in. Come in." But I won't. I know truly how cold the water is. I run to this spot every other day. It's not far, only about two miles. It's exhausting and exhilarating. My personal finish line is at the beginning of the trail.

When I first arrived at the trail, I noticed an array of trash. I saw beer cans and snack wrappers and I even spotted a condom. This makes me bewildered and confused about why people would abuse this place. For all the world as a trash can, why this place? I wonder, how long does it take for a condom to decompose? Probably much longer than a Twinkie! Somehow this place makes me ignore all that, and see what it is truly made of.

The trail is crafted in a way that makes it look uninviting. The thick overgrowth of prickly vines and bushes brings a feeling of apprehension to the path ahead. Yet, one would walk through, curious about what is further down the trail. When walking through I have to duck under tree limbs, jump over fallen trees and be careful not to slip on wet leaves. The uncanny smell of pine and bark invade my nose. Looking to my side, I can only see a few feet and the rest is blocked by green overgrowth. The canopy built by the trees acts as a filter for the bearing sun, hardly letting any light through. The darkness brings a cool comfort to me. The sunbeams let through by the trees add a neat strobe light effect when you walk through them. My shoes make a shuffling sound when walking over the brown fallen pine needles. The trees start to thin on the left, letting more and more light through. The trail opens to a small rocky shore of a lake. The sunlight is bright and it takes my eyes a moment to adjust. I stand on the shore and try to orient myself. It seems as if I am standing in the middle of a golden lake. The trail turns out to lead into a small peninsula. I am completely surrounded by water.

"Wow," I say inside. I notice that I have stopped breathing heavily from the run. It seems like this spot has stripped me of my aches and cramps that were in my legs and my side. It has freed me from the heavy pain in my chest. I feel as if I could run another ten miles.

I find my rock behind me and sit down overlooking the incandescent lake. The warmth of the summer's sun warms my back, and the occasional cool breeze off the lake has a relaxing massage effect. The water is at my feet, and I am amazed at how clear the water is. The small rocks and pebbles are rounded and sit by the water's edge. I see across the lake, but I do not see any houses or buildings, only trees. It appears this lake is hidden from the outside world, a place of tranquility and stillness.

The wind off the lake is fresh. It fills and cleanses my lungs and cools my body, refreshing me from head to toe. The gentle rustling of the leaves are chiming in tune with the lapping of the waves, lulling me to sleep...

I stand up fighting the calmness and head out, off the trail and onto the road, refreshed to run the two miles home. I smile, looking back on the trail, because I know I will be back in few short days.

"Thank you," I say quietly.

***

Crispin Conklin, 19, is aiming for a career as a civil engineer or architect. As a student in Mary O'Neil's section in fall '98, he began the semester saying his writing needed improvement. After completing the course Crispin feels "stronger, more confident" about his writing. Crispin hails from New Paltz, NY.

My Lovely Dad

by Zakia Francis

I am sitting in the living room, looking at a picture that has been hanging on the wall for many years. I see a nice looking young man with thick brown hair, big sharp eyes surrounded my long lashes, a nose well drawn, and a little moustache over this thick red lips. His warm smile shows you two white rows of teeth very aligned and his long neck lets you understand that he has a strong personality and is proud of himself.

Today that person is so different from the picture. Age and experience have added many more details: gray hair, deep eyes surrounded by a lot of wrinkles, but still sharp. He is tall and stocky. Years have placed a lot of responsibilities on his back, and that makes him look tired, but happy. He has a different walk that identifies him even from far away. He is always well-dressed and never wears short-sleeved shirts. For him it is not formal.

My father has different occupations. During the summer time, he works very hard in his wheat manufacture. He wakes up at three a.m. and works until nine p.m. During fall and spring, he takes care of his cherry orchard, and he rests all winter long.

I realize that I have misunderstood the person I am writing about. For years, my father George was for me the rudest and most aggressive man in the whole world, but as much as I hated him before, I love him today— maybe a lot more.

For so long, during my childhood and teenage years, the words *No . . . You can't . . . Don't . . . Take care . . . Be more careful . . . No good . . . You can be better . . .* seemed for me to be the only words he knew. He never let me wear what I wanted to and he never let me go out with friends. He had to choose them for me. I had to be serious, not joke, go to school, come home, study, eat and go to sleep. My father and I had no conversations between us. I had to listen and act, not argue, or he was going to give me a scary look. That is why I started to hate him and wished he was not my father. I thought he didn't love me, or didn't have a heart to love and I started wondering why my mom loved a man like that.

In other ways, he was very generous and never said no about anything we needed: clothes, food, toys, etc. He used to ask my mother to buy us everything that we needed. He respected everybody and all the people he knew respected and loved him. They always asked for his opinion. For them, he was always right and had good ideas. They took his advice and always came back to thank him.

The year my brother finished school, he decided to go to Europe and continue his studying. My father liked the idea, even if it was going to cost him a fortune. The week before his flight, we had to listen to so much advice my father gave to Joseph, but this time his voice wasn't that strong. He had something stuck in his throat that changed his voice to a very sweet one so that you could see and feel the change. My father stared at my brother with a look that seemed far away and with the tears shining in his eyes until the day came. Joseph was kissing everybody goodbye. It was my father's turn. Those tears and a lot of others came out finally. He started to cry like a little kid when somebody takes his toys away, louder and louder, and that big and long hug seemed like it didn't have an end. Suddenly, he left my brother and ran to another room. Around me, everybody was crying and my brother didn't look back. He carried his suitcase and went straight to the car.

Everybody left and I went to bed, but I couldn't sleep. My father was still crying and had pain, because he was screaming. I went to check on him. He was lying down in his bed. His face was so red with tears rolling down on the sides of his cheeks. His hand was pressing on his heart. He gave me a look that I will never forget. It erased all the hate from my heart and planted a great

love and respect for the man that I didn't understand for so long. He gave me a big hug that made me feel how great and sweet his heart and love was for us.

The next day relatives came back to check on my dad because they were surprised at what changed that strong man. He was still crying and stayed like that for almost a month, crying every time somebody asked for news about my brother. Then I started to understand my wonderful dad and why he treated us so rudely. He loved us so much and he worried about us. I started to remember the days he taught us how to act, respect others, pray, how to be strong, how to love. He wanted us to be the best kids ever.

My wedding day was another proof for me about his great love. His sweet hug was a fortune I took with me for the future. It is important to be a father, and a big responsibility. Now I understand that when he used to wait for all of us to come home and eat together around the table, it was a big pleasure for him to see us safe and happy. It wasn't because he was rude and severe.

Today, my father is my ideal in the world. He is my best friend. My love for him is so strong, and I think I am following his way with Carla, my daughter. Of course, I treat her with a little less discipline than my father showed me.

I am very glad to shatter that huge wall of glass between my father and me. I wished I was a little smarter to understand him a long time ago. Now I always ask God to give him a long and happy life, to give him back a little of his great love for me.

***

*When **Zakia Francis**, 29, arrived in the US from Lebanon, she knew no English. Now, a scant two years later, she is publishing her first work! A student of Faith Benedetti in spring '99, Zakia says that before taking the course, she didn't like to write, but believes it is now easier for her. In addition to her studies, she enjoys her job at Medisense, Inc., sports, and reading. She lives in Lawrence with her husband Elias, their daughter Carla, and by the time this is published, with a new baby girl.*

*Editors' note: Sisters **Kisys** and **Anny Bernabel** both took Basic Writing in the fall of 1998 with Margaret Bergeron. For the assignment asking students to describe a person with whom they've had a significant relationship, Anny chose their father, and Kisys their mother. When both essays were submitted by their instructor, the* Writers in Progress *staff decided to include them as companion pieces.*

A Practical Mother

by Kisys Bernabel

When I get home from school, it is rare not to find her cooking for my family and me. I always see her at home cooking something for supper every day. We will all be in the living room and smell her wonderful cooking. My favorite is homemade fried chicken with really soft mashed potatoes. While she has the rice or whatever she's cooking on the stove, she would be cutting up vegetables for a salad and dancing at the same time. I guess she likes to cook. I have never seen her complain about that; besides, we always give her a hand with whatever she needs.

I would go to the kitchen just to talk to her about anything that happened to me in the day. I would ask her how her day was at work. She would answer "Great!" and then keep on from there. She's very talkative. I see her in the morning before she goes to work and she's never wearing the same thing when I get home. To go to work, this tall slender woman wears a wide long skirt, with a top that matches perfectly, and high heels. She wears her dark brown hair down and when I get home from school she has it in a ponytail. She wears a house robe to feel comfortable doing the housework. When I talk to her, she stops what she's doing and pays attention to me, as if what I'm saying is more important than anything in the world.

She's always happy and singing the first song what comes into her head when she's cleaning. That's one of the main things in life, she says, because that way you'll live longer and feel better about yourself. When she gets mad at someone, she likes to be loud in her steps around the house. She keeps her lips closed very hard so you can tell she's mad. Her big brown eyes are wide open and she breathes so profoundly that you can hear her breath when she's mad.

My mother was raised in poverty and helped her grandmother raise her two brothers and sister. Her mother killed herself when my mother was five years old. This tragic experience made her be more mature and stronger in life. She likes to hide her feelings especially when she's in public. She's always got a smile on her face when she greets people.

"Hi, how are you doing today?" she would ask them, and their conversation would keep on from there. When's she's uncomfortable, she never talks about it; she would keep it to herself. She acts different in public compared to how she acts at home. She tries to be more polite. At home, she sits and walks however she wants; the point is to feel comfortable. If she has to put her legs up on the couch, she does it. In public, she crosses her legs when she sits down and she keeps her head up and shoulders straight. I have always remembered her like this. She has never changed, just as she always takes care of me.

I remember when I was nine years old, I was about to get hit by a car while crossing the street with her. We were coming from visiting my grandmother's house. It was a very dangerous street because cars were passing by all the time. I let go of her hand to cross it, running just for fun. The driver stopped in time and nothing happened but she was really frightened and furious because of what I did. First she asked me if I was okay and then she started to yell and grumble at me. Behind all that I knew she was doing it because she knew it was my fault. I could see on the driver's face that he was very scared too because he was nervous and asked me several times if I was okay. My mom tried to calm him down and told him not to worry because nobody got hurt.

In my opinion I think my mom is a very beautiful woman inside and outside. She's got this oval shaped face, thin lips, a pointed nose and beautiful big brown eyes. I like the way her perfume smells. Most important of all she's a loving and caring mother. Her friends think of her as a very lucky woman because she's been married for 23 years to the same person without any problems.

Of course, she has her negative side. One thing is that she gets mad about anything. I remember one of her birthdays that my dad forgot. She told my brothers and me not to tell my dad that it was her birthday, otherwise she wouldn't talk to us for a week. That gets me real mad, because my dad has a lot of problems to take care of in the house, for example, the bills. I think she acts childish sometimes. Anybody can forget a birthday but she doesn't understand it. I didn't want them to be fighting, so I told my dad it was her birthday. He ran to the store and bought her perfume and invited her out for dinner and dancing. She didn't find out that I told him, but she suspected that he did forget because it was 6 p.m. when he came home with the present instead of doing it in the morning. All her birthdays have been like that.

Even though my mother didn't finish school, she's a very smart woman and she knows how to talk in public. Unfortunately, she had to take care of her brothers and sister, so she didn't have a choice whether to go to school or not. She could only finish the 7th grade because she couldn't go on with all the responsibilities she had at home. She doesn't know any English, but she's trying to learn. She and my dad were engaged for two years before they got married and had three kids. My mom had her own goals but she lost interest after she got married and had kids. She has dedicated her life to us; she says her kids are the most important things she has. When she was in school she wanted to be a designer, but she couldn't finish school and now she's married. I'm very proud of my mom because even though she's not a career woman, she's the greatest.

Even though she couldn't finish school she's a very hard working woman. She works in a factory called Grieco Brothers. She sews clothes there. One of the things she loves is sewing and going dancing with my father on Saturday nights. Her favorite music is almost everything— she likes tropical, classical, salsa, merengue and tango. She hates insects like roaches. I remember one night we were watching TV and she saw one on the floor. She sprayed insect spray on it and then stepped on it just to make sure it was dead.

I love my mom the way she is, and I'm really proud to be her daughter because she taught me so many valuable things in life, like about education, to respect others and myself, and that if I want something in life, I should get it with hard work. She gives me advice and support on my decisions and helps me get up when I fall down. To me, she's the best mother in the whole world.

***

*Seventeen-year-old **Kisys Bernabel**, of Methuen, MA, was a student of Margaret Bergeron's in the fall of 1998. Before beginning her writing class, Kisys says, "I didn't have any interest in writing. I thought it was boring and I found it hard to write." Now, however, she says it's "kind of fun." A dental hygenist major at NECC, Kisys enjoys rollerblading, watching t.v., and going out with friends.*

Papy
by Anny Bernabel

Papy is what I call him, and this means "Daddy" in English. His name is Angel Silvio Bernabel; he hates his middle name because it belonged to a drunken man in his neighborhood. His second son is twenty-seven right now. When he was sixteen he decided not to call him Daddy anymore because he was too embarrassed. Papy got really mad and made him change his mind. I'm twenty-one at the moment and I'm not embarrassed to call him Daddy. Even if I were ninety years old, I would still keep calling him Daddy and I'm sure he'll be glad to hear me call him that.

Papy is a handsome forty-seven year old man, five feet eight inches tall. His hair is not the greatest, but is not the ugliest either, and I love it. It's shiny, curly, black hair followed by these tiny little ears that make him look even more attractive. I don't know how to define his skin color. Everybody in his family is dark, but he's not. It's not that he's white, just that he has light skin. He has a lot of pairs of glasses, not prescription ones but fashion glasses. He likes to look cool and protect himself from the sun.

His eyes are big and dark brown with very thick lashes and eyebrows. He has a nice smile, and his teeth are very little. That's why I can hardly see them when he laughs! He always smells good because of his expensive perfumes. He doesn't smoke and doesn't drink too much, only socially. He is very strong, responsible, understanding, nice, caring and loving, but when someone provokes him, he could be very aggressive.

Papy dresses up every day as if he were going out every day, even if he is staying at home. He dresses differently from my friends' fathers; his clothes are of good taste and quality. He is very neat with his clothes, well-ironed and clean. He is also fashionable. He likes jewelry, but not too much of it. He wears a gold necklace, men's bracelet, four gold rings and a watch.

I could say my dad is a very complicated man, and that's why he's always in some kind of trouble. It's because he's a very strict man and fights a lot with everyone when his plans don't come out the way he wanted.

My Papy does everything at home, not the domestic work, but the weekly shopping, paying the bills, the rent and taking care of all of our appointments. If he had to do any domestic work because my mother is sick, he will do it and he has done it before. He is the greatest!

He likes to impress everyone at a party. He always wants to be late so people miss him, worry about him or wonder where he is. He usually makes his appearance more fascinating because of this. He was even late to my sister's eighth grade graduation, and the worst part was that my sisters were with him!

Although he believes in God, he doesn't go to church because he doesn't have time. His dream is to go back to the Dominican Republic and stay at our house forever. He has nine children with five different women; the last one is my mother and thank God he is still with her. They've been together for about 24 years and my dad says that if my mom ever leaves him alone, he will look for her at another planet if it is necessary because he loves her too much to let her go that easily.

Papy loves his kids very much, to the point that he still thinks we're babies although the eldest is 28! He has always been there for all of us in all ways. He came to this country 17 years ago to find a better job and get more money because things weren't good in my country at the time. Whenever he had vacation he would go visit us and stay with his family for two weeks and on special occasions he would stay up to a month. I remember the sad good-byes we had to give him every time his vacation ended. I still have in mind the tears running down his cheeks. He didn't want to leave.

I remember one Christmas we were really happy waiting for him. It was 7 p.m. and I we didn't hear anything from him, and we started to get sad. My Mom was crying, thinking that we weren't going to have our Christmas presents. My mom didn't have any money, and we always had the best toys in the neighborhood. We stayed up late waiting, and at midnight, we decided to go to bed. My mom had some things like rollers on her hair and a night cream on her face. My mom has always been a beautiful woman, and would never like the idea of my dad looking at her like that, so when we heard a knock at the door, we got scared because we weren't expecting anyone at that late hour. My mom asked, "Who is it?"

Suddenly we heard this nice familiar voice: "It's me, my love. The man of your dreams." When we heard that voice it was like a miracle for us! We didn't even know what to do. My mom started taking her rollers off and the cream off her face too. She fixed herself a little bit for Papy. My poor Papy was outside desperately waiting when she finally opened the door and they kissed. My grandmother knew everything all along. He wanted to give us a surprise and he sure did.

A long time ago, when my Papy was younger, people would find him at nightclubs, parties or out on the streets. But now he's most likely to be found at home. Even my mom who knows him better than anybody else thinks this is a miracle. When he's at home, he could usually be found watching TV. A few months ago, he didn't like to watch the soap operas on TV, because macho men don't sit on the couch to watch the soap operas like their wives. But now he is watching them, and every time he has to go out for any reason, he will leave us recording the soap opera for him on the VCR so he doesn't miss it! You can also see him reading a book lying down in his bed. He has a very relaxed face when he's not upset and I could tell when he's worried about something because of his facial expressions. His eyebrows frown, his lips are curled and his eyes look like puppy eyes. He walks softly as if he didn't want to disturb anyone with his steps. Sometimes if I don't look at him, I may not know he's behind me because nobody can hear his steps.

He is always a gentleman when he's out in public. He exaggerates. He uses very polite words and would do anything to capture the public's attention to speak and let everyone know how smart he is.

But my Papy has a very bad temper too. If someone provokes him—yes. I remember one sunny day we were shopping at Demoulas supermarket and I was helping him with the bags. I was crossing the parking lot when suddenly I heard the annoying noise of car wheels beside me. A woman almost hit me with her car. I know it was my fault because I wasn't paying attention but she shouldn't have talked to me the way she did in front of a lot of people. She screamed and yelled at me, saying that I was stupid, that I didn't have any eyes, and so on. Papy was so upset that he started yelling at her too, and he answered that the only stupid one there was her because she was the one who was driving and that she should have honked her horn. Also, if he's upset with someone, he will let the person know just by looking at his/her eyes. He likes to slam doors and tables. He chooses those places because he wouldn't lay a hand on anyone unless someone hits him first. I've had many disagreements with him about subjects of life or family matters. For example, he thinks that I shouldn't be an organ donor because it's against the Catholic church's rules.

I remember when I was younger, things weren't easy for me to go out. I had to ask for too many permissions and beg a lot to get them. He loves to know as much as possible about his kids, where they're going and with whom. Now it's a little easier, but since I still live with him, I have to report myself once in a while if I'm going to be away from home for a long time and inform him of my steps. That's the way he was raised, and wants his kids to be raised the same. He says that his dad made him get up early every morning to either go to school or go to work with him at his meat business, depending on the season.

His dad, Luis Bernabel, used to negotiate for animals to sell their meat. He had a very important meat business at the time. My dad had to grow up at an early age. His dad thought that

kids needed to know about hard work so that they would grow to be hard working and brave people.

Papy treats everyone with respect, if they deserve it. Many people, especially his friends, think that he is a very smart guy. He always has something interesting to talk about because he is well-informed and reads a lot. I talk to him and every time I get more fascinated. I could always learn something from him.

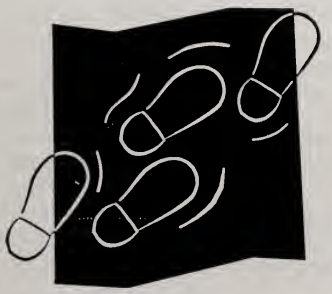
I love Papy very much and I don't think I tell him often. I don't think it is necessary because I'm sure he already knows that. He has helped me through very difficult emotional times of my life. He has taught me that life is important and good people should live it to the fullest. I would probably be a drug addict, a stupid girl with a very little world in mind if it weren't for him. Ever since I was a little girl, I have remembered his words. He used to say to me to study, to do something important with my life. To be strong, and open my eyes to reality— the world is not pink and rosy all the time; it could turn red and dangerous, and I had to be prepared in all moments because it was going to be difficult to tell what was coming next. Thanks to him I know that everyone deserves to be treated with respect; thanks to him I know that without an education I won't be able to go anywhere.

My dad is a very special guy for me, not only because he is my dad, but also because he has known how to be my friend by telling me things straight out, just they way they are, and by helping me to control my demons, letting me take care of them on my own at the right time.

I think it has been a good idea to write about my dad because even though I hardly tell him, I love and admire him for all the courage he's had to confront life, to keep on going, looking straightforward to a better living. My dad is a brave man; he has made mistakes and has lived with them trying to make up or solve any situation he might have caused. I just wish all his dreams come true and that all the problems that he has at the moment disappear. I like to pray once in a while even though I don't go to church often, and my dad is always in my mind. I pray to God to keep him healthy and out of any tragedy in life. I pray to God to give him all he wants, to let him have joy, and to possess the victory he's been searching for: complete happiness. For him, that is returning to his home and his country, the Dominican Republic.

***

Anny Bernabel, 21, took Basic Writing in the fall of 1998 with Margaret Bergeron. She says, "I've always liked writing. It's just that before I didn't have the confidence or ability to write about what really was going through my mind." After completing the course, she reflects, "It's wonderful what I can do now. I think I have discovered more about my spiritual side than ever, thanks to the writing class." Anny enjoys reading, listening to music and decorating.



Sailing in the Hurricane

by Baki Ceylan

It was my last trip as a chief officer with one of the best container ships I'd ever seen. Also, sailing in the Mediterranean was a marvelous sense I'd never felt before in my life.

We only had a brief stop in Port Benghazi, Libya, before sailing for Italy. Being at the port and having only a couple of days until the New Year made everybody happy as they bustled about the ship. They were working harder and faster than usual because they were eager to celebrate the New Year 1997 in Venice.

While I was looking at the loading operation from the main deck, one of the seamen showed up and asked me, "Sir, are we going to be in Italy on New Year's Day?"

"I bet we will be there on time," I told him. Everything was going well. Two mobile cranes from the shore and two ship's cranes were working continuously to finish the loading. All the sailors usually liked to stay longer at the ports but this time they were all in a hurry to catch the New Year in Italy.

Just before we left the port, I called up to the second officer and said, "Bring the last weather facsimile report to me."

After a couple of minutes, he showed up with the report and said anxiously, "Chief, there is a hurricane within a hundred miles."

I grabbed the report and called the Master right away to inform him about this unexpected situation. I suggested we go first through the Greek Islands and then the Adriatic Sea. However, the Master's decision was to go through Mataban, which was the shortest but most dangerous way. Indeed, the Mataban area had always terrified all sailors because this area was always furious and had shallow water that we had to be aware of. Also, many rocks existed all over the place and there was an especially narrow channel, which was the most dangerous part of the Mataban area to pass through. I felt uneasy with this decision. Although the storm should have passed by the time we reached Mataban, hurricanes can change course at any time.

I was glad that we were almost done with the loading. Now, I had to check every single item in the ship to be safe during the voyage: sealing up all the hatch covers, replacing all the maneuvering ropes of the ship, and locking all of the doors on the main deck, pilot ladder, and gangway that had to be fixed onto the ship. The next process was calling port control to get permission and let the port captain know that we were ready to leave.

I called port control by VHF. "Port control, port control. This is M/V Mint Arrow. Do you copy? Over."

"M/V Mint Arrow, this is port control. Over."

"Good evening! We are all set with the loading and ready to go. Over," I said.

"Roger, roger. The pilot will be on board in five minutes. Have a nice trip. Over," they responded. Then I gave them information about the ship size, cargo, and destination too.

We left the port without problem and set sail toward Italy. As we passed the breakwater, something bothered me but I didn't know why. I was staring out at the waves in the moonlight. They were nice, almost perfectly smooth. After a while, I looked at my watch, and it was roughly three o'clock in the morning. I went out of the bridge onto the wing deck to check the temperature and barometer. While I stayed out on the wing deck, I looked at the sea and listened to the sound of the wind. The water had become white and frothy. The waves had started breaking down onto the swells and the wind had developed with terrifying sounds. Thus, the ship started pitching up and down and rolling to both port side (left side) and starboard side (right side).

Then I opened the box where the thermometer and barometer were kept. The temperature was not bad but the barometer wasn't satisfying. It was going down compared with the last measure. That meant the weather would be very rough soon. You never know how suddenly the weather could change and you always have to be prepared for unexpected events. As a matter of fact, we knew that there was strong weather one day ahead of us right before we left the port.

I ran back to the bridge and set the facsimile machine immediately to print out the latest weather report of the area. As I now suspected, the hurricane had changed course and we were sailing right into it. I called the Master to let him know this sudden development. When he showed up, I was working on the chart to check possibilities of what to do considering the hurricane's new route.

In a short while, the ship started pitching and rolling more, due to the moderate swells and strong wind. Fortunately, we had no containers on the hatch covers and deck. Usually, container ships are loaded to full capacity; however, on this voyage, we only had cargo in the holds.

One more thing we relied on was the ship's speed. This ship was very fast and well-equipped with the latest technology. She was barely three months old. The bridge was newly designed and we were able to see all over and around the ship. The radar, gyro steering system, global positioning system (GPS), and navigation console were connected together with the computer system.

Then the Master and I discussed the situation we were in. We immediately had to prepare all crewmembers and to make sure all compartments were closed. I called the boatswain, the most experienced seaman, right away onto the bridge, and told him, "Take two seamen with you and look everywhere, make sure that everything is under control."

Within an hour, the sway of the ship began to make everybody sick. We were listing about 35-40° both starboard and port sides. The pitching, up and down, was the worst part. The ship was raising over the swells, and then—Boom!—all the way down, freefall. The books, the charts, some of the electronic machines (such as the copy machine and the navigational equipment), and chairs were moving from one side to the other.

We were in the hurricane.

The Master ordered the new course to the seaman, but got no response. Then I saw the guy was barely standing up and he wasn't able to use the steering. Immediately, I took control from the seaman and let him go to his cabin.

The Master, two deck officers, and I were on the bridge trying to keep sailing in all circumstances. At the same time, the machine engineers were down in the engine control room as well.

"Chief! There is another swell coming! Watch out!" the Master said anxiously.

"Yes, I saw. I'm going to alter the course 25° on the starboard side and as soon as we pass over the swell, alter it back to 25° on the port side again," I responded as I did it.

This extremely hard and dangerous maneuver was necessary to maintain the upright position of the ship. Otherwise, the ship could capsize into the sea. But this maneuver could cause change to the ship's stability, and then we would be in an awkward position. There was no time to think and it had to be done immediately.

Through to the morning, we were still scuffling with the furious sea. "Guys! Carefully go down and check all the cabins and how the crew is doing and bring me the report," I said to the officers.

"Yes, Chief," they responded as they looked at me.

Suddenly, the ship raised over the swells as if we were going on only the ship's propeller. As we crashed back down, the entire deck was covered with huge waves.

At that moment, we were almost sinking because the ship listed 46 ° to the starboard side. Twelve-foot heavy swells were coming from every direction. I felt we were not able to get back to the upright position again. But the gm (center of the ship's gravity) was good enough to get us back up again because the containers were loaded only in the holds and the water flowed off the deck as we raised on the next swell.

At the end of the second day, the swells had started to come over from only one direction, and the wind was a little bit milder. The Master looked at me and said, "Chief, this is the time that we can set course towards Italy."

I said, "It looks like we can. I think we can also give the new ETA [estimated time of arrival] to the agencies. Right?"

He said, "Right! Let's inform them of our ETA."

So I calculated the time of arrival and also prepared the order list that consisted of food supplies and some other things that we needed for the next trip after Italy.

Three days later, with no sleep and no food, we were still up on the bridge, totally exhausted as we were watching the Italian coast come into sight. The sun was dazzling our eyes. New Year's Day had passed while we were in the hurricane, and we all felt a deep sense of joy to be alive. There were only a couple hours left to fix the ship to the pier.

The second officer reminded me that we were approaching the checkpoint. A couple minutes later, I called the Venice port control by VHF to confirm our ETA. "Venice port control, Venice port control. This is M/V Mint Arrow. Do you copy? Over."

"M/V Mint Arrow. This is Venice port control. Channel 14. Over."

Then I changed the channel from 16 to 14, and gave them our ETA. Everybody was demonstrating strong feelings of happiness again in the ship because we were safe and sailing toward Venice, Italy.

The hurricane was over, but three ships had sunk into the sea in the Mataban area. We were at the port again, and I was barely standing up as I called the Boatswain.

"Open all the hatch covers," I said.

"Yes, sir," he said happily. There was no time to sleep again because I had to unload the ship.

I didn't join the next trip because I was done with my contract. I left the ship in Italy and celebrated the New Year with my family. On that night, we all gathered around the table, and I related my story of sailing in the hurricane.

This experience made me feel a couple years older. This job, being a ship's captain, carries the responsibility of the lives of your crew. With hurricanes and other unexpected happenings, I gained more than a few gray hairs.

Indeed, this experience taught me lots of valuable knowledge. Now, I literally understand what I have to do in spite of this kind of natural disaster. You cannot learn this in school. If you are a sailor, sooner or later you will encounter this kind of event. At that time, you have to command your ship and accomplish your job. And of course, your crew will be proud of you. These feelings are the best part of being a captain.

***

*Captain **Baki Ceylan**, 28, originally hails from Istanbul (not Constantinople), Turkey. As he already has a Bachelor's degree, he has enrolled at NECC simply to strengthen his English skills, with hopes of enrolling in a Master's program for ship-chartering, and, one day, owning a shipping company. Baki's interests include boating, basketball, technology, and traveling. After taking Basic Writing with Mary O'Neil in the spring of 1999, he feels better about his writing and more prepared to begin an advanced degree program.*

What Have I Done to Deserve This?

by Therese Jbeily

Life is strange. We are convinced that we have forgotten certain memories when a simple word or slight suggestion acts like a sparkle to revive the past time again. Nobody knows what the future has in store.

Two days ago, walking along the hallway at the college, something grabbed my attention. "What Have I Done to Deserve This?" was a simple title of a Spanish movie for the Foreign Film Festival, but for me it was an instinctive introspection. It let me go back twenty years ago, and remember a bitter experience I thought was buried forever.

It was January 1976, a fortnight after New Year's Eve in a quiet and peaceful town called Damour located fifteen miles south of Beirut, the capitol of Lebanon. Damour was an elegant town, built on a hill overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. That's where I was born, spent my childhood and my youth among a middle-class family with sisters and brothers. I had just graduated from the University when I got a new job as a teacher in my town's high school. I had nothing to worry about. My life seemed to be wonderful.

On the night of January 15, I was sleeping quietly at home, dreaming about my splendid future when my town was exposed to a terrible bloody massacre. I don't know who was responsible for this horrible violence. I remember only that we were exposed to a constant and intensive bombardment which lasted until dawn. That was a terrible moment of confusion and terror. I heard my parents shouting, "They are bombing our town. Hurry up, go down to the basement."

Uprooted from our quiet bed and our sweet dreams, we were downstairs in a minute, bare feet and tousled hair, unable to realize what was going on. Living in a one-floor house, our neighbors, gasping and trembling from fear and cold, came to shelter with us. One hour later, our basement was crowded. The children's cries were mingled with the elder's wails. The men showed a remarkable composure, but their eyes reflected anxiety about their children's lives. Terrified, the babies snuggled up against their mothers to find protection, warmth and quietude. Among the inside and outside noises, a soft lullaby had a balsamic effect to appease the babies' sobs.

I had to squash up with my brothers and sisters to make room for more people. A great feeling of mutual support filled our hearts. We were all equal: poor, rich, old and young unified by our unknowable destiny. My parents didn't forget their hospitality: sometimes my mother ventured upstairs to get some food, beverage and candies for children, or it was my father's turn to pick up blankets and pillows. The sounds of ambulance and fire-engine came to us and spread fear in our hearts. The deafening noises from different cannon balls tore and lightened the sky. That was like a firework that had a wrong address. Every minute seemed to be a century.

I remember my mother's voice: "Holy Mary, please take the bombs away from the garden. Save us."

"Amen," we instinctively replied.

In addition to our misfortune, the violent bombardment had caused several power cuts. We were in a complete darkness, except for some candles which made flickering shadows on our pale faces. Huddled in a corner, I felt the fear penetrate into my veins. It made my blood run cold and my teeth clash. With every bomb, I felt my death became true. I lost control of my nerves. There was no other way to calm down than to invoke God and all the Saints, to help us through the interminable nightmare.

By dawn, the bombardment began to slacken off a bit. My parents went upstairs to evaluate the damages in our home: all the windows were broken, the Christmas tree was lying miserably on the floor, and the velvet curtains hung up piteously, beside ripped chairs and smashed crystal vases.

Our Calvary wasn't finished yet. We spent one more day in our home, but the night was worse. We had our share of intensive bombing. We thought all hell's doors were opened, or that the Apocalypse had begun. We spent an insufferable night of terror, but the morning was the worst.

Armed militia of all nationalities and colors spread terror by killing people and burning houses. That was the exodus of 30,000 civilians. We were obliged to leave everything, to run towards the shore where some boats transported passengers to another town located in the north of Beirut. It was a hallucination of a trip, the likes of which Sinbad had never seen. Finally, we arrived completely exhausted, totally divested and perfectly disoriented.

Among all the miseries there is a place for a relaxing anecdote: at Damour, we had a young musician priest who taught us several new religious hymns, especially one entitled "Leave Everything and Follow Me." When we arrived at the new town, a sympathetic parishioner saw the priest from a distance and said, "Hey Father! You spent all your time singing the song, and look! We all did it!"

Two days later, we knew that our town was burned and completely destroyed.

Living in a new town was a terrible moment of confusion for me and my family. I couldn't realize what happened. How could I face this atrocious situation! I was like a stranger coming from another planet. Fortunately I still had my job as a teacher in public high school. Even though the government gave us enough time to overcome this situation, I decided to change this stuffy atmosphere by returning rapidly to work.

I don't forget what my reaction was to see new students, new faces. Oh! I missed my real ones! Some of them were killed. Really, I felt disoriented to lose my books, my lessons prepared with ardor and all my papers. How could I teach French classic authors and speak about honor, duty, human dignity and all the moral values while I was completely demoralized?

Traumatized by my new condition, I lost my belief in the existence of human values. I was unable to rewrite my thesis already burned, so I had sworn not to touch books anymore.

My parents were the real support for us. "It is difficult to lose everything," said my father, "but this is a common disaster. We are better off than all others; we are all safe." These encouraging words had their beneficial effect. My father, who was retired, went back to work and so did my mother.

It is against my nature to be pessimistic, especially to lose hope when I was 25 years old. With determination and self-confidence, I went back to school with a smiling face. Surprised by my incredible changes, my parents acclaimed, "That's our daughter."

My real combat began. I had sometimes to teach eight hours per day. Because I needed something absorbing, I had been teaching math for five years. My mind was fully occupied by solving math problems, so the bitter memories began to fade. Time heals all the sorrows.

After so many years of wandering, we are living together in the United States. Here I enjoy tranquility and stability. I didn't keep my promise "not to touch books," so I am studying and am pleased to do it. Although I am in middle age, I look at the future with optimism, but I still remember this unforgettable experience which turned my life upside down, and am still asking myself, "What have I done to deserve this?"

***

*Lebanese-born **Therese Jbeily**, 54, wrote her way through Mary O'Neil's Basic Writing course in the spring of '99. Therese, a full-time student, already has a Bachelor's degree, but seeks to continue her education. She was "embarrassed" when beginning the course because her English experience was limited, but now, she says, "I feel pleased. It is an enjoyable experience for me to be an English student after being a French teacher." She lists as her hobbies music, reading, and sometimes cooking. Therese lives in Methuen.*

The Day of Revolution
by Akil Verisha

It was early in the morning and as I was sleeping, the clock started its melodies to show that the time had come to 6:30 a.m. As usual, I was having a hard time to wake up. I turned over to the other side of my bed and tried to ignore the clicking clock, but I heard my mother's voice saying, "Akil! It's time for you to wake up, and you better do so. Otherwise you'll be late for school." Her strong voice shook me from my sleep and I realized I had to get myself ready for school.

I got up from the bed and I headed straight for the bathroom, and washed up. When I finished my personal needs, I went into the living room and saw my mother spreading breakfast on the table.

"Good morning, young man," she said when she saw me. "Your food is ready."

I, still half-asleep, responded, "Good morning, Mom," and sat down to eat.

"Has your brother woke up yet?" my mother asked as I was eating.

"I don't know, Mom," I said to her. "I haven't heard him walking around the house yet, so I think he's still in his bed."

Before I had finished my sentence, my mother was yelling again. "Parid! Wake up! You'll be late for work!"

"I'm already up, Mom," he responded from a distance.

The time had gone 7 a.m., and before I knew it, I had to hurry before I was late for school. I went to my room and dressed, took my books which were lying on a table in the corner of my room, put them in my bag and hurried into the hall to put on my shoes and grab my jacket. While I was going out the door, I yelled to my mother "OK, Mom! I'm leaving!"

"Akil! Behave yourself and get back home right after school. Don't wander off in the streets with your friends," she said. Pretending I didn't hear her, I closed the door and ran off for the school bus.

The bus let us off in front of the high school and the students rushed to get inside. I went to my class to see if the absences were taken yet. Fortunately, I was on time, for right after me, the homeroom teacher came in with his big book in his hand. He called off our names one by one, and then started the day's lesson.

"Alright, people! Get your books on the table and let me see your homework," he said. The commotion started around the classroom: "Did you do your homework?" or "Were you able to solve the last exercise?"

After the first period, the next teacher came in and the day went onward in the usual routine. At midday, in my class, which had windows facing the main road, suddenly we all saw at the same time a big crowd of people, about 100, yelling and coming towards our school. At the moment, we weren't able to hear their words, but as they came closer, we could hear them chanting and saying "Death to the Communist Regime!" and "Death to the Communist President!" and "Long Live Freedom and Democracy."

We couldn't believe our ears, but as they kept saying these different slogans, our emotions were aroused and we were ready to join the crowd. Among the students, some were saying to each other, "We have to join them," and "They are protesting for our rights, too!" On the other side, we could hear some voices saying "What if the police beat us or kill us, huh?!"

Suddenly, teachers' voices were in the hallways, saying to each other, "We should lock the doors, or the students will join them." We heard them talking and immediately piled out of the class. There, we saw all the other students wanting to join the protesters too. The teachers realized

what we were up to, and tried to put a hold on us. The doors were locked at the time, and we found out that we were trapped in the building.

From the end of the hallway, a voice shouted, "Let us out, or we will turn the school upside down!" That's all we wanted, and abruptly, we were galvanized in our own protest, breaking the leader's portraits that were hung in each classroom.

Demonstrators outside the school heard us yelling and breaking glass and they began to encourage us to break down the doors and come outside. With a big effort and their instructions, we were able to open the doors. The outside crowd seemed very happy when they saw us coming out, and felt twice as strong after we joined them.

"Let's head towards the downtown," a voice from the crowd cried, and that's what we did.

By the time we reached downtown, we realized that the crowd had become many times larger than it had been. It was then that the police surrounded us, trying to disperse the demonstrators with their long sticks or by throwing smoke bombs. The smoke started to rise in the air, choking us. That aggravated us, and we started to fight back, throwing stones or whatever we could find. They saw that they were not able to stop us, so they called in the Special Forces, hoping to scatter us with their tanks.

The tanks showed up in a very short time, and they drove through the crowd. It seemed as if they wanted to fight with an army and forget that we were their own people. That aggravated us even more, and we were saying, "How can they take the courage to fight against us?!"

Fortunately, we were very careful and none of us got hurt. The people were irate with what the police were doing to us. As a result, we responded by blocking the roads with big obstacles, such as huge stones, tables, old trees, and by throwing fire bottles at them, too. They realized that the tanks were futile to stop us, and they left. But it didn't end there. Snipers had taken their hidden positions and started to shoot at us. People started to fall on the ground, and for a moment, we didn't know what happened to them. But blood spilled on the pavement and revealed to us that they had been shot. Voices and screams rang out: "They are shooting at us! Oh my God! We have to stop them!"

Furious at what they were doing, we started searching for them. As we were doing so, my best friend who was right beside me fell unconscious on the ground. He was shot.

"Marvis!" I called. "Don't give up, buddy! I'll get help!" I went towards a car that was getting the wounded people to take them to hospital. Some of my friends and I quickly and gently put him in the car, but unfortunately, there was no room for me to go with them. The car took him to the hospital and I turned back to the crowd.

My blood was boiling for revenge. Energetically, we headed for the main Communist building to burn it down. That's what we did. The building was set on fire, but no one was inside. They had all escaped through a secret tunnel which took them to safety. Their building was on fire, and the snipers had left. I guess they were afraid that if they shot more people, we could have burned the whole city.

With no more shootings or police around us anymore, there was nothing left for us to do. It was getting dark, and the crowd dispersed for their homes. Somehow, we felt proud of what we did that day, but at the same time, we were hurting inside of us for the people who had been shot.

I didn't go home yet. Instead, I went to the hospital to find out if my friend was alive. Fortunately, I got good news from the doctors when they told me that he had made it, although half of his lung was removed. I was shocked for a moment, but realized that it could have been worse for him. I consoled myself and went back home after the doctors said that it was impossible for me to see him that night.

Victorious and happy about what we had achieved that night, and grateful that Marvis was alive, I proudly told my parents that we had overthrown the Communists. It didn't take long and the

Communists themselves resigned from the power of leading the country. Now there is democracy and freedom. If it wasn't for us that day, Albania could still be a Communist country today. I hope and pray that the day we passed never comes back, and that the people have the freedom they want.

(Editors' note: Akil's original draft of the narrative ended here. But as he was working on his revisions, the crisis in Kosovo was escalating, and NATO began an air war with Yugoslavia. What follows is the conclusion of his final paper.)

Now, despite the revolution that we brought, our region has new tragedies and struggles. This time, it is not in Albania, but to the ethnic Albanians in neighboring Kosovo. The crisis in Kosovo is worse than any revolution ever. People in this region are being forced to abandon their homes, lands, properties, and their most precious thing: their birthplace and homeland, which has been inherited from their ancestors for generations.

Innocent children are having their worst nightmares ever imagined. They don't even know what a war is, or why their brothers or fathers are being killed in front of them. Why are their sisters or mothers being raped? Is this a future, or a past, for a child to have? Because of these atrocities, and the humanitarian crisis, NATO and the United States have intervened to stop Slobodan Milosevic, the new-born Hitler who represents himself as the president of Serbia. He himself well knows that this war cannot be won. He wants to complete the unfinished mission his ancestors began against us, this ethnic cleansing. He is a vain man who wants to enter history one way or the other.

I hope this war ends soon and no more lives are wasted. I hope the criminals will be brought to justice. No one has the right to destroy their homes, their lives, to make them flee to unknown roads. I hope that NATO makes it safe again for our people to return back home. After all, we are entering the 21st century, and we should never tolerate a disgusting war like this ever again. The time and the moment do not allow for it.

***

***Akil Verisha**, 23, was born in Albania. He is currently majoring in Liberal Arts, but hopes to eventually have a career in Dentistry. At the beginning of the semester, Akil "thought that I would fail in my writings, and worried that they would be horrible to read." Now he feels that he has "achieved and overcome the fear of writing." A full-time shipping clerk and resident of Haverhill, he enjoys playing soccer, driving fast, and listening to Techno. He was a student of Faith Benedetti's in spring '99.*

7th Grade

by Andrea Acosta

This was it. This was going to make all the girls die with envy. Here I was in the seventh grade and talking to the most popular boy. His name was Scott Murphy and we had been planning to get together before school for about a week or so. I think I was taller than he. I was taller than most of the boys at that time. But that was life. They soon would grow taller.

Scott had big round brown eyes, and long blond hair— not like Hanson, though. He was so cute, and when he smiled, one of his front teeth overlapped the other. He was by no means a candidate for braces and headgear. He had a twin brother named Brett, and they looked exactly the same except he was a real jerk. He was so full of himself that it actually made him ugly. They, Scott and Brett, were the most popular boys in the whole grade. All the popular girls each had their turn "going out" with them. Scott and I had become good friends. I was by no means in the "in" crowd, nor was I a geek. I was in the middle, in nowhere land. I had my friends, but we were all pretty invisible. This day was going to get me on the map.

I took special care that Monday morning getting ready for school. I was to meet Scott in the far corner of the aqueduct on the other side of the football field under the pine trees. The style then was to wear brown leather moccasins (the ones with the double ring buckle and strap). People who wore them wore them all the time— in the rain, in the snow, no matter what the weather was. When the sole wore out, you would put plastic bags inside until you could convince your parents to have them resoled. You never bought a new pair because it took so long for them to fit your feet exactly the way they were shaped, and besides, the older and more worn they looked, the cooler you looked. So, I left my house in my black corduroy tapered Levi's, a white, long-sleeved thermal shirt with my favorite AC/DC T-shirt over it, and my worn old jean jacket. My moccasins completed the outfit.

My friends and I walked to school, laughing and joking, and trying to fit as many swear words into our conversation as possible. When we arrived at the entrance to the field, they continued on to the school building and I proceeded to my destination. Scott was arriving at the same time. It was the Monday before Thanksgiving and the air was crisp and the breeze was sharp at times. We made ourselves comfortable in piles of fallen leaves and pine needles. No one could see us where we sat, and we smoked a couple of cigarettes while we talked about our math teacher. I pulled out a bottle and his eyes lit right up. "Where did you get it?" he asked.

"From my sister's house," I told him.

We cracked open the bottle and took a large swallow; the taste was disgusting, but neither one of us wanted to admit that it was our first time drinking alcohol. We passed the bottle back and forth to each other while trying not to gag. It suddenly did not feel so cold outside and the breeze felt good on our faces. What seemed a long time was actually 15 minutes. The warning bell rang, and we helped each other to our feet and took the last sips of the bottle before tossing it in a bush. We had just drunk a pint of Seagram's 7.

We made our way back to the school holding hands and said our goodbyes outside his homeroom with a quick kiss. The look on the faces of the girls who usually hang around his homeroom, just to take a peek at him, was priceless. They did not know that we were holding hands to keep each other steady and the kiss was just some silly thing we did because of the booze. I was not going to tell them, either. It was best to let them stew over what they saw.

I thought I was okay— a little warmer than usual, but okay. My friend Nikki was waiting for me in homeroom. "How did it go?" she whispered to me.

"Fine," I said in a loud voice. It was beginning to hit me. There was a test in my first period math class but I slept through it. It was a blackout. I met up with Scott after class and we walked to voc class. I went up to home ec and he went to shop. Ten minutes into my class, the principal and nurse requested to see me in the hallway. Apparently my last period teacher told them I did not look too good. They sent me back to class and I sighed with relief. They didn't suspect a thing; or so I thought. I had no idea I smelled like a brewery. I got settled into my seat in class. The desks were like the ones in *Welcome Back, Kotter*, all connected in a row. I began to feel hot and dizzy. I looked at my other classmates and they were blurry.

Suddenly, I didn't feel good and before I could do a thing . . . I puked all over Karen Fritz. I lost my balance and fell to the side, knocking her over, which in turn resulted in the domino effect of the entire row. Some kids were laughing and others were mad, one kid even vomited himself after seeing me do it. I tried to stand up, but my moccasins slipped in the vomit, and I fell again. I was carted off by the custodian to the nurse's office, where I saw Scott. He had thrown up 12 times in shop—all over the teacher and the printing press.

We had done it! We had made 7th grade history. Our parents and principal played good cop/bad cop, but neither one of us spoke. They even went as far as to say to our friends that we were in the hospital having our stomachs pumped and they needed to know what we drank. I didn't tell anyone and it was a surprise for Scott. We were both suspended for three days, but my mother didn't punish me because she thought it was punishment enough tossing my cookies in front of everyone. Little did she know that I was not acknowledged as human by the 8th graders, I was worshiped by the 7th, and I was feared by the 6th . . .

***

Andrea Acosta, a student in Carol Barron's class in the spring of 1999, shared her sense of humor in her writing assignments. She has always liked writing and "still likes it," after taking the class. Andrea is a wife and mother of three, and lives in Lawrence, Massachusetts. She is enrolled in the Human Services major at Northern Essex.

An Evening in the Toy Store

by Cathy Mendonca

When I woke up that cold January morning in 1997, I had no idea that I would be lying face down on the floor in Toys R Us that very evening. Who would have guessed? I never would have. What happened later that night was the most embarrassing moment of my life.

The day started out to be pleasant enough, until early evening when my husband said: "Let's bring the kids to Toys R Us so they can spend the money they got for Christmas."

"OK, let's go," I replied, as I went upstairs to get Adam, who was ten, and Stephanie, who was five, ready to go. The Salem, N.H. Toys R Us is the closest one to our house, so we went there. While driving, the kids were talking excitedly to each other about what they wanted to buy with their money.

"I want a new video game," Adam said to his sister.

"Well, I want to get a new baby doll, a new doll house and an Easy-Bake Oven," Stephanie said, adding to the conversation. My husband and I looked at each other and chuckled.

"We're here," I said as we pulled into the parking lot. As we tucked the car into a parking spot, I noticed that there were not many cars in the lot. "What time is it, Mark?" I asked my husband.

"It's 8:30," he answered. *It's late; that's why there are not a lot of people here,* I thought, as we all jumped out of the car and went in. Upon entering the store, I grabbed a carriage and flyer to see what items were on sale that week. While flipping through the flyer, I noticed that the first aisle had birthday supplies—balloons, wrapping paper and party favors. The next aisle was filled with art supplies, crayons, paints, and markers. Since my kids had most of these things, they were not interested.

"Let's go look at the video games first," Adam said impatiently.

"No, I want to go look at some girls' things," Stephanie said anxiously as she tugged on my coat.

"We all have to stay together," I said firmly. "I don't want anyone to get lost."

"Oh, Mom," Adam said, while picking up a pogo stick he had noticed leaning against the shelf of toys.

"Hey Mom, watch me," he shouted in excitement. Looking up from the flyer, I could see Adam trying out the pogo stick. He wasn't having any luck. Standing there watching him, I couldn't help but remember how much I loved the pogo stick when I was a little girl. I used to play with mine every day.

"Let me show you how it's done, Adam. Stand back and give the pro some room," I said rather confidently.

"Dad, look at Mom, she's going to try the pogo stick," Adam shouted, handing me the stick.

Well. Let me tell you: I found out that I was no longer a little girl that day. While balancing the stick by the crossbar handles, I put one foot on the pedal and leaned back a little, then while jumping up, I put the other foot on the other pedal. Simple enough, right? Wrong. When I came back down, the rubber on the bottom of the stick slipped on the floor. It was then that I started getting a sick feeling in my stomach. I knew that at that point I was doomed. I couldn't get my foot off the pedal in time to catch myself, so I landed face down on the floor with the stick under me. When I turned around, I could hear my husband asking me, "Are you alright?" I told him I was, as he helped me up. Once I was on my feet, I looked around to see if

there was anyone else in the aisle. There wasn't anyone else that I could see. Nonetheless, I still felt very embarrassed. My husband and kids were laughing at me as I brushed the dirt from the floor off my clothes.

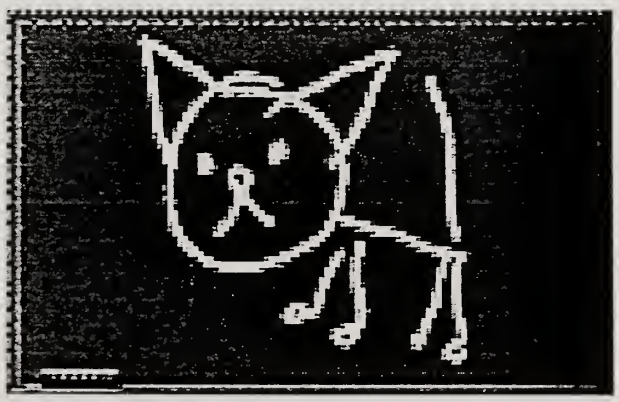
"It's not funny," I said. "Stop laughing at me!"

"Yes it is," my husband said, while tears were rolling down his face from laughing so much. "That's the funniest thing I have ever seen. Too bad we didn't have a video camera. I think you would've won first prize on *America's Funniest Home Videos* with that stunt," he said, gasping for air.

Needless to say, they laughed their way through the whole store while shopping. Although my husband was very concerned about whether or not I was hurt and kept asking me if I was alright, he couldn't help but laugh every time he looked at me. The kids found and bought what they wanted. Adam got a new NFL football video game and Stephanie got a child-sized kitchen and an Easy-Bake Oven. We all jumped back in the car and made our way home.

Thinking of how I must have looked from my family's point of view lying on the floor in the middle of a toy store, I couldn't help but laugh also. Every time I mention it to my husband, he laughs to the point of tears, as if it had just happened.

I learned a very important lesson that day: *you're really not as young as you feel.* I've added pogo sticks to my list of things not to do.



***

*Although she avoids pogo sticks, **Cathy Mendonca**, of Fall River, MA, does enjoy exercising. A student of Margaret Bergeron's in the fall of 1998, she was "excited about" writing before taking Basic Writing. Now, "I enjoy writing the papers and . . . having other people read them," says Cathy—so much so that even though she's pursuing a career in graphic design, she's become very interested in writing.*

The Adventures of a Cabdriver

by Guillermo Ramos

My brother and I were living in an apartment sharing the expenses of it. Soon he got married and moved to another apartment with his wife. I decided to stay in the apartment and take care of the bills myself. I had a part-time job in a gas station near where I lived. I needed another job because of the new responsibility. I decided I wanted to be a cabdriver for two reasons: first of all, I didn't have to pay taxes if I didn't want to and second, I loved to drive.

I went to the Lawrence Police Station to fill out an application in order to get a cabdriver's license. The next day, I went to the Yellow Cab office, which was located at 344 Broadway Street in Lawrence. Once there, I talked to Caesar who was the owner of the cab company. He told me that I needed to take at least one week of training before I could get the job. Some people I had met before were working there. I thought I would feel comfortable in my new job.

Instead of one week of training, I took two, but I didn't know why it wasn't enough to learn what I had to learn. Cuco, a funny, hairless cabdriver, was the one I took the training with. He taught me how to use the microphone to talk to the dispatcher. Every time it was his turn to pick up a passenger, I sat in the front passenger seat of the car and he would tell me the name of each street we passed. He also told me to write down the street names so I could remember them more easily. It was very difficult for me to learn those street names because most of them didn't have the sign with the name on it. Furthermore, one street may have more than three names. For example, I lived at 30 Spruce Street, in Lawrence, but if I walked up the street, it became Daisy Street. If I kept walking, it would become Manchester Street. However, if I walked down the street, its name would change to Park Street and so on.

The third week I found myself driving a cab. It was a 1985 Lincoln Town Car. I liked the car, even though it wasn't in good condition. The speedometer didn't work, so from park, I had to move the gearshift one to the right to set the car in reverse and two more to the right to put it in drive. The side mirrors were broken so I only used the rearview mirror to see what was going on in back while I was driving.

In Lawrence and surrounding areas, cab companies don't work like cab companies of other cities or towns. Usually in other cities cab drivers pick up only one passenger or call-up and take him/her where s/he wants to go. As a matter of fact, I have learned that it is against the law to pick up two or more different passengers in the street who are going to different addresses. In Lawrence, things are not the same. There are few cab companies and none of them has more than fifteen cabs. Imagine when, in one hour, fifty people call on the phone to ask for a taxi. None of the cab companies would give good service if they sent a cab for each customer. Instead, they pick up more than one passenger at once.

Cab drivers are in constant communication with the dispatcher. The dispatcher may tell the cab driver to pick up one person at a certain address and then give him three more calls to pick up without dropping off the first one and take them where they want to go. Because of that, customers are always complaining about the service of the cab companies. When that happened to me, I said to them that I had been given the call five minutes before. I also told them that they know how taxis work and if they had any complaint, they should go to the cab company office and talk to the owner.

The first month was very difficult for me to adjust myself to the new job. I worked from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. I couldn't take my lunch at the same hour every day because I was not supposed to. There was always a passenger to pick up and there was no time for me to stop and have lunch.

Usually, I went to a fast food service like McDonald's or Burger King, and bought a Double Whopper and a small coke or anything through the drive-thru. Of course, I had to eat what I bought in the car. Sometimes I had to pee while I was working. To do that, I had to be a little creative. I waited until I was clear— no passengers in the cab— and then I went to a street where there wasn't too much traffic. I opened the trunk or doors of the cab and pretended I was fixing something. Then, paying special attention not to wet the car, I peed. It must be very difficult for a female cab driver to do that. There I was, working 12 hours a day, not making enough money because I was a rookie, eating junk food, not exercising, and not having time to pee, with my potbelly making me look like a little Buddha.

As time passed, I was getting better and better at my job. I had almost learned all the street names in Lawrence, and in other towns such as Methuen, Lowell and Andover. I began to familiarize myself with the passengers. I noticed they called a cab every day to go to the same places, which were their homes, schools, jobs, hospitals, or friends' houses. If I heard the dispatcher giving 45 Park Street to one of my co-workers at 10 a.m., I knew the person was going to the elementary school to pick up her little seven-year-old son. I learned to avoid traffic lights by using other streets to get to the call faster.

I had bad, good and funny days on my job. There were days I made more than $200 for myself, but there were also days I took home less than $20. I remember one night I was driving a couple to Lowell. I glanced in the rearview mirror. What I saw was unbelievable! They were making love. We almost got killed because I kept on looking through the rearview mirror and I was driving on the wrong side of the road. A big truck was coming toward us beeping the horn. Thank God I had a few seconds to act. I stopped and told them that they better stop doing what they were doing or otherwise I would call the police. They must have been very concentrated on what they were doing, because they didn't even look at me, or pay attention to what I said. I repeated it for the second time and was given a brand new $100 bill to shut my mouth and stop bothering them. "Okay, but please don't rush. Take your time, guys," I said.

Another day, I found myself dropping off a teen in an apartment complex. He opened the door and ran away without paying the fare. I quickly ran after him with a little bat I always carried with me. When I realized I had no chance to get him, I threw the bat at him, but I missed. Then he took it and began chasing me. I had never run so fast in my life. I didn't get hurt because I had left the engine running and the driver's door open.

At first I thought driving a cab was the easiest and funniest job I had ever had. I cannot tell you that I didn't have fun, but I also had many boring days because I had to do the same thing daily. I learned that to be a good cab driver I not only had to know the town and surrounding area very well, but I also had to be aware of what was happening around me.

Sometimes when I see a cab passing by, I remember when I was a cab driver. I remember Cuco, my potbelly, my pee difficulties, the brand new $100 bill, what happened in front of the apartment complex, and other things I didn't dare mention in this paper. The experience I gained in that job is worth more than gold and I will always carry it with me. When I am a granddad, I will entertain my kids with my adventures as a cab driver.

***

Guillermo Ramos, 24, of the Dominican Republic, felt "writing was like having to resolve an algebra problem with a basic math skill" before taking Mary O'Neil's class. After completing Basic Writing he says, "Nowadays I feel more comfortable about writing." A computer science major, Guillermo enjoys reading and clubbing on the weekends.

A New York City Bodega

by Lenny K. Pichardo

It was January 5, 1996. It was the coldest night of the winter, when I arrived at Kennedy Airport in New York City— the city that everyone knows about, the city that I always wanted to live in, the city of big dreams. I was 18 years old and I had just come back from the Dominican Republic, where I had lived for the past two years. My uncle, whom we call "Chocolate," had a grocery store and he asked me to go to the store with him, so that I wouldn't stay home alone. I was okay with the idea because I didn't want to be at the apartment by myself.

The first day I was very excited because the store was in Manhattan, near the downtown area, but I was also very nervous because my English accent was really bad and I didn't want people to make fun of me. I really like big cities. I thought that I was going to have a chance to see the city that I dreamed of living in, and instead I met a bunch of rude people. I thought that everybody in New York was rude. For every two words they say, there has to be a "fuck" or a "shit" in there somewhere. In about two to three days I got used to it. The bit of the city that I saw was huge and there were people all over the place.

When I went into the store I felt uncomfortable because I thought it would be nicer. The store was a little dirty and very dusty. The floor was cracked and the shelves weren't organized. The walls were full of posters of beer and other things. The kitchen and the bathroom were worse; they were so filthy that I didn't want to go in either one. The kitchen was full of dirty dishes and the bathroom was dirty, with graffiti all over the wall. The store smelled like beer and cigarettes. Then a bunch of crackheads would come in and try to sell things that they had stolen from the streets.

At first I didn't do much and I didn't ask my uncle to take me out because he was attending the store. Then I started to help him and insisted on helping him, because I thought that it wasn't fair for him. I was not a little kid anymore and I wanted to prove it to him, so she could trust me.

I started stocking the shelves and cleaning the store. In about a week I had the store a lot cleaner than it was. I had cleaned the store so well that some people called me *"la sirvienta de Chocolate"* (Chocolate's maid), which I thought was funny. Then I tried to help him with some customers and watch out for the little kids who tried to steal the candy. I also went out to pay some utility bills. Before I knew it, I was taking care of the store almost all by myself. I was there from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 a.m., seven days a week. I was doing everything from ordering what the store needed to the accounting, which wasn't much because he wasn't responsible enough to organize it. Being in the store all day felt as if I were an alien who couldn't go out and get a legal job, as if I had to work and get paid under the table.

To work at a grocery store you have to be very patient, but at the same time you have to be very quick and active, because grocery stores in New York are always full of customers and they are always in a hurry. You have to be able to punch up the total amount of their purchase and give the exact change back. At the same time you have to look out for the kids and crackheads who are always trying to steal from the store, and make sure that the customers are not giving you counterfeit money.

There were some regular customers who were very nice. There was this one bum called Silvio who was the funniest. There was also this girl who used to ask me to take my hat off because my hair was long and she thought that it was nice. There were also people who weren't nice. Like these two guys who sold drugs nearby. They ruled over the block where the store was located. They were always in the store buying cigarettes, beer, and Philly Blunts. Sometimes they would come in just to ask for change. There was this one time that they had a kid about 18 years old sell drugs for them. Apparently the kid tried to lie to them by saying that the police took the drugs from

him and that he couldn't be responsible for the money. They took the kid to the back of the store without my knowing what was going on, and beat the shit out of him. By the time I noticed and ran to the back to stop the fight, the kid was beaten really badly. The kid was bleeding because they had thrown cans of food on his face. The kid was hurt really bad. I felt really sorry for him.

There was this one time when something really bad happened to me. It was a Friday night and it was about 11:30 p.m. after a long day of work and I was looking forward to going home. We had some guys come in, like always, by the bunch. They were talking to each other. I could tell that they were drunk. One of them asked me for a pack of cigarettes. I gave him the cigarettes and said, "Two-fifty please." He took out the money from the little pocket of his jeans and tossed it on the counter. It was a five-dollar bill, rolled up into a little ball. I grabbed it and opened it in front of them as they were talking.

I gave him his change back and he said, "What's this?"

I replied, "That's your change. You gave me five dollars."

He started to get really loud, saying a bunch of bad words. Then we started arguing and getting louder. It seemed like we were going to fight and Chocolate said, "Okay, give him the rest of his money." I did.

After they left, Chocolate said, "You don't know where he is from and if he wants to locate you he could find you right here anytime he wants. It's not worth it. Next time you just need to be more careful." After that night I felt stupid and I didn't feel like going to the store anymore. Then I started to get tired of working at the store because I was in the store all day long and I noticed that I was going nowhere.

Working in a menial job with no future made me decide that I had to leave and get another job. I also decided to get my GED, so I took a day off and filled out some applications for jobs and looked into getting my GED. To be able to get the GED, I had to get some paperwork from the school that I had attended before, so I came to Lowell to get them. When I came here my brother asked me to stay because he needed a roommate for his apartment. I stayed a week, and on the following week I had a new job, at the clinic where I'm working now.

The clinic is very nice, very different from a grocery store. People are very polite and they appreciate what I do for them. The office is really clean. I get good benefits and weekends off. I definitely like to help people, so I think that I'm going to stay in the medical field for my future career. But I would never again work at a grocery store— or with any of my family members.

***

Lenny K. Pichardo is a Liberal Arts major from Lawrence. He was a student of Faith Benedetti in spring '99.

My First Job
by Anthony Sciosci

I was nineteen years old and living in Dublin, New Hampshire. I had just been released from a one-year therapeutic community. I was trying to make the transition back into society. I had just acquired my C.N.A. license. I went to A.R.O. Community Health Care to apply for a job. I was greeted warmly. I got the job because there is a big demand for males in the health field, not to mention one who is six foot four, two hundred fifty pounds. I was immediately offered a full-time position, at eight dollars an hour, which is rare in an agency. They prefer not to hire full-time people. They try to have people with many different clients throughout the day, having them do two-hour visits. I was very pleased with the outcome because now I had a full-time job. My client was a 31-year-old male. He was six feet tall and suffered from a head injury caused by a car accident. He was paving the town and was struck by a passing car.

On my first day, I met his sister. She was very polite and helpful. She explained what was expected of me. I was to come in at 8:30 a.m., get him some warm water in a basin and help him wash. I would then ask him to pick out his clothing for the day, offering choices for him to pick out. After he picked his clothes, I helped him get dressed. Once we completed the task, I would get him into his wheelchair. He would help me push him to the bathroom, where he would brush his hair, brush his teeth, and shave. By this time he would be starved, so I would prepare his breakfast, which was either oatmeal or cream of wheat.

When I first arrived, I had to feed him with a spoon and watch for him to swallow. There was a great risk he could aspirate. This was a great amount of responsibility. I was the only one, next to his family, allowed to feed him. This filled me with a lot of pride. I took it upon myself to help him try new consistencies. At first, he rejected the new food. He was scared of the new texture. I started to eat lunch with him. I brought subs and chips, all the foods he wanted, sparking him to want my food. I used this as motivation. I started preparing harder meals of a more ground and dry consistency. What I learned was I had to stop the teaching approach. What worked well was not trying to learn the act again. I had to figure out ways to trigger his brain to remember the act.

After breakfast we would go to his room for some range of motion exercises, a series of stretch exercises that helped maintain muscle tone and prevent contractures. The series consisted of stretching his right arm and hand, moving the arm to its normal range—in his case whatever movement you could get. He suffered from contractures as a result of neglect. During his stay at a nursing home, where he was in a coma for a year, they neglected to stretch his muscles, resulting in these contractures. Contractures are the depletion of the muscle that pulls the limb and contorts it. He had contracture in the knees, right arm and shoulder. His shoulder has a gap in the joint, about a finger width wide, causing his hand to turn inward at the wrist, contorting his fingers inward.

After a month's time of stretching, I had regained some muscle tone in his shoulder, wrist and fingers. If he was relaxed I could get his fingers to come out practically straight. Next I would stretch his legs. He had contractures in his knees. Most of his pelvis is metal. He had two total hip replacements, a fracture in his right shin and a metal rod connecting his left leg to his foot. This part was very emotionally draining and immensely painful for him to do. In order to have his full attention and have him work with me effectively, I had to open a channel of communication. I allowed breaks in between exercises. I also started having music on and talking about current

events. This helped to occupy his mind and take the focus off his pain. I also started to use his family and his son as motivators. I would ask him if he wanted to walk again with his son. I would also tell him that he had a son and he could not give up. He had a responsibility to take care of himself, so he could be there for his boy.

I had to take a lot of precautions not to reinjure him. We started with bending his left knee ten times. Next, he would dangle his leg off the side of the bed and lift it to the top of the bed. This helped stretch his hip and was very painful. After completing these with his right leg, he would work on hip rolls, rolling from one side of the bed to the other. Again, this was very painful. Once he was stretched I would strap him to a straight board. This helped him to get used to the feeling of standing. Slowly I lowered him, eventually having him standing for half an hour. I used that time to take his vital signs and record them. After his workout, I would get him off the board and back in the wheelchair for lunch. I would bring him to the dining room for lunch. Lunch was something his sister left for him, usually something pureed. While he was digesting his lunch we would work on speech therapy. Once he would finish his routine we would have a break, either watching television or taking a walk outside.

Within the three years I worked with my client, I found if I wanted him to reach certain goals I was going to have to find a source of motivation. I found I had to include my life into his. I wanted him to try to walk. He had been bedridden for four years and moving him at all was a chore. I came in and talked to him as a friend. I gave him his freedom. I brought in music we both liked. I talked about my news, my love life; I opened my heart to him and we became friends. In return, he gained my trust and respect. He knew I was not about to put him in any danger, so when I had asked him to put his all into an activity that would be very painful, he would try it. He knew I would not harm him and I was there to help because I cared. With the help of many other people, we worked to get him to eat ground foods, be able to stand and do pivot transfers, walk with a walker, and speak clearly. My client is progressing at this very moment.

***

"I was intimidated by my inability to write efficiently," says 22-year-old ***Anthony Scioscia****. After a semester of bold and honest writing in fall '98 with Margaret Bergeron, he is "confident and learning from . . . mistakes." Anthony (not surprisingly, from his essay here) plans for a career in nursing—specifically with head injury patients. He lives in Londonderry, N.H., and is the father of two children, Ashley, 4, and D.J., 2.*

Backpacking
by Adam J. Sideri

Backpacking is one of the most enjoyable sports that I have found. It is relaxing as well as an excellent workout at the same time. It is the perfect way to escape the stress of everyday life and to become one with yourself. Out there you have no distractions—it's just you and the outdoors. Backpacking has been a good part of my life for as long as I could walk and carry some weight.

Trips that I have been on consist of two weeks in New Mexico, one week at Denali National Park in Alaska, four weeks in the Keni Fjords National Park and several week-long or several day-long trips to the White Mountains. Other experience that I have in planning trips is that I helped to start an outing club at my high school, and played a big role in planning and executing the excursions. I have had a tremendous amount of education in group planning and functions from the scouting program and knowledge that I have picked up over the years through trial and error. Taking people out into the wilderness who are not generally used to this type of experience is something that I enjoy immensely. I find it enjoyable to answer questions about the history of the trails and about the natural resources that surround them.

From all these experiences I have learned that backpacking involves a lot more than throwing a pack on your back, emptying your cabinets of junk food (like a mixture of soda and food that requires a bottle of the pink stuff to digest) into a pack and going. This sport involves a lot of planning and preparation. If all goes well your experience will take off much more smoothly and be safer and more enjoyable if you plan right for it.

In order to go out into the wilderness and get back safely without getting lost, or running into a snowstorm at the summit, it is necessary to decide where you want to go and what time of year you are going. What I mean by this is that it is necessary for your safety that you plan on the trails and mountains that you want to conquer beforehand. The reason that you need to be familiar with the time of year that you will be going is for weather reasons. At the base of the mountain it may feel like a warm spring day, but at the summit there could be freezing temperatures. I ran into a situation like that about four years ago when we summited Mt. Garfield. We were caught in whiteout conditions in late April. In order to help you decide on the trails, you need maps and a book describing the trails that you decide on. Make sure that the map tells you the elevation, water supplies and most importantly, if the trail is kept up to date and maintained. Let me tell you, there is nothing worse than getting to an intersection of a trail and finding that the one you want to take has been closed. The book on trail descriptions will help you plan how long the trek will take and where all the scenic outlooks are.

There are so many considerations to make. Whom will you take with you? Or do you want to make a solo trek? Either way, you need to come up with an itinerary of what you are doing and when you will be back. It is usually a good idea to leave a copy of this at a ranger's station close by, with a responsible person who will remember to call if they do not hear from you when you are supposed to return.

If you are planning on going with a group, find out their fitness and experience levels before you go. It is generally good to know this because you really don't want to take someone on your ten-mile trip if they get short-winded hiking one. If the case is that they are the only partners that you can get, well, you may have to pick a different itinerary. Remember that the trip should be enjoyable as well as challenging for everyone in the group, but do not try to kill them or their attitude on the trip will bring down the whole group's stamina. You may also want to take a Red Cross first aid course. Become familiar with how far a ranger's station is at all times and come up with release forms, so if anything happens or someone gets hurt you have a little "CYA."

Now that you have decided who will be partaking in this adventure and you have given careful thought to where you are going, I think it will be safe to say it's time to look at your equipment. Do you have everything you need? Is your sleeping bag going to keep you warm enough? Is your backpacking stove able to simmer up a gourmet feast and is your tent going to keep you dry? Check out all of your equipment for defects that might have happened on your last trip that you could be unaware of. One perfect example I have is that the pump on my stove swelled up in storage. Unfortunately, I assumed it was in working condition, and that stupid assumption made warm meals for that trip only a dream.

Now it is time for TTPS, the Tree Time Packing System. This is a system I developed as a result of always forgetting something, or when I went to buy what I needed the night before, the camping store not having it. Make a checklist of all the equipment you need to bring. If you have trouble deciding, just take into consideration everything you do on a day-to-day basis, like brushing your teeth, getting dressed, cooking a meal, going to the bathroom, and sleeping. Think about how you can do these things in the great outdoors. Remember, what you want to bring you are responsible for carrying. So, instead of taking your electric toothbrush with a five-pound tube of toothpaste, pick up a cheap plastic toothbrush and a travel-sized tube of toothpaste. Leave the cast iron set of pans at home and bring lightweight cookware. Forget about bringing your huge bed comforter accompanied by a feather pillow. Instead, bring a sleeping bag, properly rated for the weather, and use a stuffed sack full of clothes for a pillow.

Gather up all your equipment, as if you were packing to leave. Go through your list, check off what you have and make a list of what you need. This first step I generally like to do a week and a half before the trip to give plenty of time to acquire the items on the list. Look at your list and equipment again after four or five days to remind yourself if there was anything you needed to get. Right now would be a good time to get it. At the end of the week, pack the mess up and you will get a good night's sleep, knowing you are all set and have not forgotten anything.

Remember, there are no sub shops at the top of most peaks. What will you eat? This is the most important aspect you need to plan for because it will make or break your fun in the outdoors. You need to pack light and healthy. Diets do not count on these trips. You need the fat for energy. You have to take into consideration who can carry what and how much they can carry. You can go with light freeze dried foods, which most of the time need a lot of taste testing before you find the one that tastes good. Or, you can purchase a book on outdoor gourmet cooking, which I highly recommend because I am still looking for that one good freeze dried meal. You will find it amazing just what you can construct for meals in the outback. Make sure your menu is suitable for everyone else. If you decide to make gourmet backpacking meals, be positive that it is something you have practiced cooking before you leave. Remember to plan for snacks throughout the day and at least two quarts of water to drink. If you don't mind the weight of a bottle of wine, it is perfect for around the campfire, but **remember, what you pack in, you pack out.**

You need to plan who will drive up and who will drive back. If your trek is not a loop hike, plan who will drive their vehicle and drop it off at the finish point. Finally, as trip leader, get your group together with all their equipment for a shake down in which you go through their equipment to see if they have what they need and go over the trip plans for the last time before you leave.

Oh, and have fun!

***

*Outdoorsman extraordinaire **Adam Sideri** was a student of Suzanne Van Wert in fall '98. He is an accomplished drummer with an extensive collection of t-shirts featuring Animal the Muppet. Adam enjoys creative writing, as well as drumming, playing guitar, hiking, backpacking, snowboarding, taking pictures, and any outdoor adventure sports. A liberal arts major, Adam lives in Methuen.*

How to Be a Procrastinating Pro!

by Eric O'Neill

For as long as I can remember I have always been good at procrastinating. I have had a natural knack for singling out what it is I should do, and then finding out what it is I want to do—and doing that instead. There are several different ways of procrastinating and many different techniques to becoming a successful procrastinator. I will take you step by step through several situations to help you enhance some of your procrastinating techniques.

In order to be good at procrastinating, you must first be able to acknowledge what it is that you really should be doing. If this step does not happen, then you really aren't avoiding anything and you cannot be considered a true procrastinator. (Maybe "clueless" is a better title for you.) Once you have pinpointed the task you hate, you want to picture yourself doing it in your head and imagine how awful it is having to do this tedious task. You may want to recite in your head phrases like, "Why me?" and "I hate having to _____" [*insert task*], making it seem like it is the end of the world. This will help to eliminate any thought or feeling of what you should be doing. Try to avoid the rationale that you are blowing this out of proportion and that doing the task is actually easier than sitting and thinking about doing it.

Now the easy part is to select an activity that is much more fun. Anything at this point will seem to be more fun after putting yourself through the haggling of whether or not you should be productive. Now go out and have fun, and try really hard not to think about that pesky old task. If you are finding it hard to disregard that task that you are avoiding then it will be important for you to select another time you can do it to make yourself feel better. The only problem with this step is that you will have to repeat this entire process once the new time has arrived. You will find it to be much easier to consider the task to be solved so that you do not have to worry about it anymore.

Lastly, you will eventually encounter some people who cannot relate to you as a procrastinator. This will make it important for you to speak their language by improvising a little bit. Very simply, you must tell them what it is they want to hear. If they require a lengthy and dramatic explanation why you did not complete the task at hand, then you must be able to deliver. You will find that the more dramatic and crazy your story is, the more believable it is. I find being a victim to a crazy and unusual circumstance to be very effective.

I'm sure that there are some of you out there thinking to yourselves, "But Eric, do these steps apply to school work?" These steps work best on schoolwork, especially studying! Schoolwork helped me to become one of the all-time best procrastinators around! It eventually led to annoying household chores, errands, and even responsibilities at work. The possibilities are endless! If you find yourself to be bogged down and put out by annoying responsibilities, then you might have what it takes to become an excellent procrastinator. You can't lose—it's impossible to procrastinate being a procrastinator!

***

*Before enrolling in Joanna Fortna's Basic Writing class in fall '98, **Eric O'Neill** says that he "lacked the confidence to write a paper and let someone else read it. I am now comfortable with my writing style." A liberal arts major, he is undecided about his career objective. Currently, he works as a waiter, and in his free time, in addition to his self-professed skill at procrastinating, Eric enjoys hiking, reading, and golf. He is 25 and lives in Hamilton.*

"Matchmaker, Matchmaker..." Finding A Life Partner in Japan

by Mike Maki

Some people are too reserved or shy to have an opportunity to meet and date the person they have been eyeing from afar. This tendency is particularly true in Japan. The idea of arranged marriage has developed there over many years. Hollywood movies have greatly influenced the idea of falling in love in the Japanese culture, but still, the concept of arranged marriage remains widely accepted.

If someone has a grown son or daughter, and thinks he or she has only a few chances to meet a girlfriend or boyfriend, it might not be a bad idea to try to plan a traditional arranged marriage. Here is the way it goes: first, you have to find a *nakodo* or a matchmaker, a person who arranges marriages. In Japan, most go-betweens are not "professionals." More frequently, they are people, such as experienced teachers or older relatives, who are respected and who know how to size up people.

The arranged marriage process usually begins when the matchmaker informally approaches one party and proposes a match. A formal written request is then made, accompanied by a brief personal history, similar to a résumé, with a photo of the prospective bride or groom. If the response is favorable, negotiations can proceed.

Then the matchmaker decides on a suitable place or occasion for this formal meeting. All parties concerned—the two people with their parents—gather for a chance to observe and assess each other. After the meeting, both parties have to decide whether to continue negotiations. If the man and the woman decide that they would like to see each other again, they then date for a length of time. The consensus of both can lead to engagement. However, if either party feels that the match is not right, or if the matchmaker cannot overcome their objections, it will come to an end. Many people go through several formal meetings like this until finding a suitable partner.

Today an arranged marriage does not seem to be as popular as the Western style of "falling in love." However, this traditional Japanese practice may have two advantages over the popular marriage style. One is that the couple is brought together by someone who is able to size up things like personality, interests, and academic background. The other one is the fact that this approach gives a chance to the people who come from different backgrounds or places. Otherwise they would never meet each other.

Moreover, this system may have something to do with the low divorce rate in Japan. One statistic shows that out of a hundred couples, only one or two have broken up each year for the past ten years. This tradition probably has minimized the number of heartbroken children in Japan.

My parents, who had an arranged marriage, continue to be an example of love to my family. My father had been a devoted, hard working electrician. Since he was the eldest son of four siblings in his family, he worked and worked for them day and night. On the other hand, my mother, the eldest daughter of six siblings in her family, had been helping her mother by taking care of her little brothers and sisters, and doing house chores. They had no chance of looking around for an appropriate spouse. When both sets of parents realized that their son or daughter was ready to marry, they asked a matchmaker to arrange a formal meeting where my father and mother happened to meet one another for the first time with their parents. My father did not mention his experience at all. My mother, however, told me that he had looked like a very trustworthy man. The matchmaker strongly recommended them to proceed. After a couple of dates with my father, my mother decided to say yes. But she was not sure that she would be accepted by my father's side,

because he was not good at showing his feelings directly. Finally, she was told by the matchmaker that my father was ready to marry her. She told me that she was very happy with it.

Marriage of either type needs commitment from the two people to be married. If one believes that marriage is an unconditional agreement, an arranged marriage might be a positive and practical way of building up and maintaining a relationship. Marriage based mainly on a feeling of love is like building a house on the sand. As many couples tend to trust only their feelings toward their spouses, they would lose their foundation soon after this feeling goes away. A feeling of love should come after trusting each other along with responsibility of togetherness. This in-and-out tendency in marriages today may have people put more value on the arranged marriage system still working in Japan and some other countries around the world.

***

Michael Maki, 47, is a Marketing Manager who calls both Andover, Mass. and Tokyo, Japan his home. A student of Mike Wilcomb in spring '99, Mike says that before his class in Basic Writing, he "didn't know how to kick in" to a writing assignment, and now feels he has gotten more used to the process. He is working toward a career in International Business. When he is not globe-hopping, he enjoys swimming and playing tennis for leisure activities. He currently lives in Andover with his wife, Kay, and their four children.

Music
by Paki Phillips

Music is definitely one of the most popular hobbies (or whatever you want to call it) in the world. Music is what has formed part of my identity. Music is a big part of my life, because it is something that I love to listen to, and have listened to ever since I was a little boy. I listen to different varieties of music. Listening to some music, like rap for example, brings back memories and history, and reminds me of my roots and culture to an extent. There are songs that were made about slavery, a perfect example of history. There were also black musicians that played a big part because in my eyes they were positive role models that I had growing up.

I grew up listening to jazz, New Age, a lot of MoTown's greatest hits, R&B, and rap (what is now called hip-hop music). Groups and singers I like are the Isley Brothers, the Temptations, Michael Jackson, Prince, Quincy Jones, Maze, Lauryn Hill, Davina, Lost Boyz, DMX, 2Pac, Gang Starr, KRS 1, Wu Tang, and A Tribe Called Quest. Some of the groups are what my parents used to play when I was growing up and that I used to listen to; others are groups and artists I listen to now. Some is music that my parents played at family parties and music I used to hear driving in the car with them. MoTown's greatest hits were songs that everyone used to listen to, and what my parents introduced me to growing up. Groups like the Isley Brothers, the Temptations, and Quincy Jones, made love songs. They talked about how to treat people, how to love, how most people want to be loved, have you ever been in love, what to do when you're in love, and what not to do to these special people that you are in love with. I also listen to R&B and rap music by groups or artists like Michael Jackson, Prince, Lost Boyz, DMX, Davina, and Lauryn Hill. These are the songs that you listen to when you are at parties, dancing, or just on your own time.

Listening to some music brings back a lot of memories, especially musical artists Michael Jackson and the Artist Formerly Known as Prince. When I was a little boy, about seven years old, my older brother Jelani and I used to do these concerts at our house on our couch. We used to dress up like Michael Jackson with the leather pants and silver sparkly glove he wore, and with cowboy boots and cowboy hats like Prince. We sang and danced to songs like "Bad" by Michael Jackson and "Purple Rain" by Prince. We held these concerts mostly during holiday occasions, Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter, and especially birthday parties, all in front of our family members. I wanted to be like them so badly. They were my heroes at the time, and were people I used to look up to. I used to look up to them because they were very successful black musicians. They gave me a sense of motivation and made me think about the future, what I am going to be.

My favorite music overall is rap, because to me it is things that are really happening, negative or positive. It is music that is dealing with real life situations, some that I can relate to and some I can't. Songs about family, how much you love your mother, father, sisters, brothers. Songs about the good old days growing up as a kid, getting into trouble, getting disciplined by your parents, and being punished. Songs I cannot relate to are the ones about killing people, gangbanging, suicide, and guns or weapons in general. Some rappers I feel bad for, because they talk in their music about how they grew up—the struggles they had to go through, growing up with single mothers and no contact with their fathers, living in the ghetto with no money, and managing without much. The reason I listen to this type of music, rap, or these particular songs is that I like the beats and lyrics these particular musicians come up with. I like how the songs talk about how these individuals or groups struggled, but now these people are making it in the world today.

In explaining songs that relate to my history, culture, and roots, there are a lot of musicians and groups that talk about this. Music by the rap group Wu Tang Killa Bees and their song "Never Again" had a really big impact on me, as I am a black male. The song talks about history and what

happened with blacks in the old days with slavery. "Never Again" is about the slavery period, how blacks had to suffer and go through that horrible tragedy. Reminding you what happened, the song talks about "How blacks were stripped of their cultures/Robbed of their names, freedom, had to take orders/And how babies were stripped away from their mothers." It is one of those songs that really makes you think about all the bad things that have happened, and that we all hope will never happen again.

In conclusion, I feel music has definitely formed a part of my identity. The reason in that from listening to MoTown, jazz, and New Age music, I learned to respect different artists and groups. I found that from groups such as the Isley Brothers there are different ways to treat people and to show that special person how much you love him or her. I learned from doing the concerts of Michael Jackson and Prince that it is good to dream and to hope for the future, to set goals, and to have role models or people to look up to. I also found that listening to different rap groups, such as the Wu Tang Killa Bees, I can learn about my history and culture and the tragedy of slavery that blacks went through. So it is clear to me that music has been a big part of my life, and will be until the day I die.

***

Prince-wannabe ***Paki Phillips****, 19, "thought [he] wasn't good" at writing before completing Suzanne Van Wert's class in fall '98. We think his inclusion in* Writers-in-Progress *'99-'00 proves otherwise. Paki, who is enrolled in the graphic design program at Northern Essex, lives in Derry,N.H. with his mom Jamila, his dad Tony, and his brother Jelani (a.k.a. "Michael Jackson"). Paki's hobbies include basketball, soccer, and chess.*

The David's Shower Show

by David Aliperti

I was in the third grade when I heard my voice for the first time. My class was having a science program in which I was going to be the small intestine in a play. I used to sing when I was in the shower; actually, I used to perform in the stall, with tap dancing and everything, and that used to drive my neighbors below my apartment crazy. Three weeks past the science project play, my class went to the auditorium to watch our presentation that was taped on video.

I will never forget that day. It was a cloudy morning. We were all sitting on fading red plastic chairs, right in front of the TV. We had dancing tonsils, and my best friend was a pancreas. After all the steps of digestion, it was my turn to send glucose and fructose to the blood. Then I had a terrible revelation. I heard a whiny voice, whinier than a girl's voice, saying, "Hello, I am the small intestine and I am the last step in digestion . . . ." My hand was frozen. I could not believe that thing was my voice!

"Is that my voice? No way! You guys are tricking me!" I said, in despair. That could never be my real voice, but it was. I had just realized that the sound of my voice is annoying, and I decided never to open my mouth again. That night I came home in a mournful mood. I told my mother that something should be wrong with my ears, because I heard my voice as a different beautiful sound— completely different than I heard in the auditorium.

She explained to me that we hear our own voice in a different way, because of some reason I didn't really understand. The reason didn't really matter. What mattered was that even Donald Duck had a better voice than I! That night, the shower stall was in silence. I could hear the water dripping in the drain for the first time, to my neighbor's happiness. In some telephone calls, the callers used to call me "Ma'am," thinking that I was the housewife (and unfortunately, some still do). A thousand times I have said "no" to vacuum machine sellers, medical plans, and bingo games in the name of my mother.

When I became a fourth grader, I was obligated to have flute lessons in the private school I was going to. I thought that maybe this was going to be my relationship to music. My brother was already having flute classes and he was the best in his class. I thought that maybe this talent was hidden in the family blood. Maybe I could still have a chance in the musical world. Maybe I could play flute in the shower, instead of sing.

Unfortunately, flute was not my area. I hated flute the same way I hated my classes, my teacher, and all the other musical instruments they introduced me to— and they all hated me back. All the students were learning to play "Yellow Submarine" and I was completely withdrawn in the class, looking at my friends playing that stupid song while I was cleaning the pianos. I almost flunked the class. I did not learn anything at all and I had to polish all the other students' flutes so I could have a grade.

I decided never again to try any kind of musical experience, for humanity's happiness. Nobody needs a beautiful voice to be happy, and anyway, I don't have to hear my own voice— but my neighbors do. After I overcame this problem, my variety show back into the "Stall Theater." My shower show came back twice as rich, with new music, interviews, and soap opera.

There are some things in your life that you cannot solve, but if you try, you can overcome anything.

***

David Aliperti may have started out as a shower singer, but he is now a talented "plastic artist" (as he lists his current and intended occupation). He endeared himself to all as a student of Joanna Fortna in fall 1998. Originally from Brazil, David, 17, lists as his interests Portuguese poetry, painting, drawing, sculptures, and acting. Although he felt he "couldn't write a line" when he began Basic Writing, he now feels able "to learn, accept, and repair" his errors.

Saving Grace
by Klara P. Vajda

The year was 1956, the year of Hungarian revolution against Russian oppression. Just before the revolution broke out, the new government allowed my family to move back to the capital and my three siblings and I started to take piano lessons. That was the year when I first went to a real concert. Until then we only had an old radio. We could only listen to two stations. On Sunday afternoons, for one hour there was dance music. My parents wanted us to learn to dance. Sundays from three to four o'clock in the afternoon my father taught my sister and me dancing while my mother taught my oldest brother. My youngest brother was a toddler at the time.

My grandparents on my mother's side and my parents were very well educated people. They frequently attended concerts and they held season tickets to the Opera House. For six long years, between 1950 and 1956, we were not exposed to music. I recall my grandmother humming all the time. I started to hum too. I liked to play "school" with my friends and we had music lessons too. We often sang. Learning to play the piano and going to my first concert opened my ears and I started to feel real hunger for music. I never considered becoming a professional musician, but music was in my life—like daily bread, something essential.

The first live concert I attended was conducted by Leonard Bernstein. Mr. Bernstein was a guest conductor in Hungary. The event was an unforgettable memory, to hear the orchestra live, to learn to hear each major instrument. Leonard Bernstein was extraordinary. He explained everything to us before the concert started. For the winter season, he had a series of concerts for youngsters like I was then. Mr. Bernstein knew exactly how to teach young people. He knew what to play for teenagers. The music program was compelling. The orchestra was the third in rank in Hungary. They played Beethoven symphonies, Mozart's "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik," and Vivaldi's "The Four Seasons." The acoustics of the place were outstanding. It was a privilege to be there for every concert. Mr. Bernstein's enthusiasm made me fall in love with classical music. Later, my ears were able to hear, process, and understand more difficult music, for example, Bartók's music. I needed time to understand operas, too, and it took time to understand Wagner.

In the meantime I grew to love other kinds of music. I started to attend dances on Sunday afternoons at my school. We danced mostly "rock and roll." We listened to Elvis Presley all the time. He was American and he was the King of Rock and Roll. At that time in Hungary, we loved and admired everything that came from America. In my middle school years, I learned Hungarian folk dance, and we performed a few times. After high school graduation I stopped taking piano lessons. Practicing every day for one hour somehow became a burden and I did not enjoy my own music.

My favorite activity became listening to classical music and attending concerts. About a year after my high school graduation, I went to the Opera House to see Béla Bartók's ballet, *The Wonderful Mandarin*. After that year, I went to see it every single winter season. The story is quite simple. A mandarin, who is wounded, hit, and beaten over and over again always gets up and keeps going. He gets back on his feet, but somehow it becomes very visible that his energy level is weakening. Although his energy and physical strength are about to leave him, his motivation and his spirit overtake his being, and he survives.

After 1976, since I left Hungary, I never had a chance to see this piece again. I never had a chance to hear this music again. The music and the moral of the story have stayed with me until

today. I identify with the Mandarin story and I feel my life turned out like his life. This story keeps me going and gives me energy over and over again.

Now my children are teenagers and they all listen to different music. I would never ask them to turn off their music. I ask them to close their doors, and not to be disrespectful toward each other. In my kitchen we listen to classical music. If any of my girls decides to take over my kitchen and the cooking for the day, we hear her music that day. In my car the classical music station is on—WCRB 102.5 FM. This is the station that I turn on when I go to sleep and the station that comes up in the morning when my alarm goes off. Classical music saved me so many times when I felt miserable. I listen to the music until it penetrates my mind and my heart. I listen to the music until misery leaves me and I am able to think positively. I listen to the music until my thoughts take a constructive path. Music is a cleansing experience in my life. I have noticed numerous times that classical music as a background has a very calming effect on hyperactive children.

There is music in nature. For a long time I was not able to hear it. I was wrapped up in my misery and I was running, rushing, and competing with craziness. Now I am able to hear the different animals singing.

Music has the power to take away cruelty in life. Music has the power to save us people from craziness. Music has the power to heal our miserable souls. Music can talk to us and convince us to be better. Music is clean, elegant and uplifting. Music takes us to places where we dream we want to be. Music is able to fill our emotional hunger. Music is a form of art touching every single human being except people who are deaf. I was not able to contact a deaf person and ask if he or she is able to enjoy any part of music—for example, the rhythm. I cannot imagine my life without music. Without music, I feel deaf. Music reminds me constantly that there is something or somebody who rules the universe. Music is divine.

***

"Writing is a wonderful way to express ourselves," says ***Klara Vajda****. A student of Faith Benedetti in spring '99, Klara has been a citizen of the world: she was born in Hungary, and has lived all over Europe, in the Middle East, and in South America. She is fluent in five languages. A major in the paralegal program, she is working toward a career in law, and hopes to develop laws for new inventions and scientific innovations. Klara, 56, works in housekeeping and catering, and says that her hobby is "people." She lives in Andover with her three daughters.*

To Be or Not To Be

by Ricardo Mitchell

The topic of euthanasia has become a major social issue in recent years. Most people cannot come to collective agreement about this topic. Some people would like the freedom to take their own lives if they choose to, without the threat of being placed in some kind of mental institution. Others may argue differently, saying it's a way of committing murder and a cowardly way of escaping problems. I think that every one should have the right and freedom to commit suicide if they choose to. There are many different reasons why people would want to commit suicide.

The freedom of choice is entitled to everyone— the freedom to do whatever they wish, just as long as what they do does not affect anybody else in a negative way. Therefore, the issue of assisted suicide shouldn't be one to debate about. People may argue that assisted suicide could become a potential loophole for murderers to get away after killing someone. I fail to see this as strong enough ground to prevent people from exercising their rights. The potential use of euthanasia as a defense can be eliminated with the use of modern technology and the institution of enforced guidelines.

Looking at this issue from an economic point of view, one could see the benefits. For example, there would be more resources to go around such as food and wealth, just to name a few. Another benefit is the fact that we would have fewer people to worry about which would reduce the stress on our minds. Some may say that this type of thinking is cruel. I say, wake up! Wake up and look at the world around us and see the cruelty in which we live every day. We are currently faced with problems of overcrowding in many parts of the world. If a few people decide on taking their own lives, why should we try and stop them? We should see this as a small way of helping to fix a large problem. At the same time, try and understand their reasons, and help them in whatever way we can.

Another area that concerns me is the people who suffer from terminal illnesses such as brain cancer and AIDS. The fact is that these people are going to die at some point. Therefore, why have them suffer through the pain and misery that comes with these illnesses? This is where euthanasia is very important, because some of these people do not have the capability to take their lives on their own and would need assistance. People are hindered from assisting because of the fear of being charged with murder and potentially facing a death penalty for being a Good Samaritan. I believe it is more cruel to have people suffering. Loved ones pay enormous hospital bills for drugs which only prolong the suffering. This money could be used to help defray the funeral costs, or some other expense.

One may argue that people like Dr. Kevorkian are trying to play God, and question whether they have the right to decide when it is someone's time to die. These people say that Kevorkian and those like him are only encouraging people to take their lives when the odds are against them. This is pure baloney, because these same people are also trying to play God. They are not only trying to prevent the inevitable. Some of these are making money one way or another through the misfortunes of others. Most hospital administrators dislike fundamentalists like Dr. Kevorkian, due to the fact that he is cutting out a large hole in their monopoly. People will now have the choice between euthanasia, or a machine that is not a guarantee of life but of a large hospital bill to pay at the end of the day.

One may argue that if a person is so ill, how can s/he make such a large decision about life? How do we know they want to die? To answer this, I will use the example of a person in coma. Your mother is sick to the point where she ends up being in a coma and her chances of waking up

are very slim. The decision of pulling the plug would rest on your shoulders, or someone else whom she entrusts to make decisions regarding her life in such a situation. The same systems need to apply to cases of euthanasia, where an individual can not decide for him- or herself.

All people are going to die sometime. It is a destiny for all mortals. Therefore, why ridicule a person who decides on doing what will be inevitable? One might argue that these people are selfish and are only thinking of themselves instead of the effects the suicide might have on their loved ones. However, their loved ones need to respect these individuals' decisions. They need to understand that they themselves might someday be in a situation in which they would like to take their own lives. People do not just decide one day that they are going to kill themselves, saying "Today is a lovely day. I think I am going to kill myself." They must have carefully thought about such an action. We need to keep in mind that we live in a free country. However, we are not truly free, if people are not allowed to make independent decisions regarding their own lives. This is my opinion on the right to die.

What's yours?

***

Soft-spoken ***Ricardo Mitchell*** *speaks out strongly in this paper, which he wrote in the fall of 1998 in Mary O'Neil's Basic Writing class. Ricardo, 20, is originally from Kingston, Jamaica.*

War

by Olga Marchenko

War is a terrible thing which people must accept without choice. The most important thing is not that war can cost life for each individual, but it can bring a common disaster for the whole society. Through the whole history of our Universe, there have always been wars. There is no alternative to war. I don't have any advice about preventing war either. My father and uncle were soldiers of World War II, and my nephew was a soldier of the Afghanistan war. I reason like a woman and a mother of two sons: I am against war.

World War II was not a just war for the Russian people. It brought a lot of disaster, deaths, and broken destinies. Germany invaded Russia without an announcement of war, even though the people in my country were living a peaceful life. It was a bold attack, unprovoked by my people. The whole economy was reconstructed for the war and everybody who was a reservist or who was of age was mobilized for the war. There were a lot of volunteers who lied about their age because they wanted to go protect the Motherland. They usually went without family permission to the front. The peaceful life of each family and individual was directed into military channels. Everybody had to forget about his own private life. The soldiers fought for their own land and the civilian population worked for the war. There was not enough food, medicine, and military equipment. Often only enthusiasm could help us defeat the enemy. There were a lot of times when somebody saved the life of friends by shielding them with his body from the enemy machine gun.

The war affected each family in many ways. There were a lot of losses, broken families, and homelessness. A lot of children lost parents. Sometimes they could live in shelters, have a little food, clothes, and some education. But there were not enough shelters with not enough food in them, and children preferred to live in the streets. Hunger was the most horrific effect of the war. My mother didn't have food either. Sometimes she had an opportunity to search for some potatoes in the frozen soil. They could be food for her. She remembers that and has never liked to eat them since the war. Hunger forced many into lives of crime. Lawlessness and unsanitary conditions predominated on the streets.

The Russian people were forced into war. My father had been a soldier in the regular Army on the Belorussian Front when the second war began. He never liked to speak about his experience during the War because it was like an injury to his heart. But whenever somebody would ask him about the War, it always made tears appear in his eyes. A lot of friends were killed right before his eyes. It would happen very close to him, but he couldn't help them. It was a permanent fight for him, and he could never forget about it. The constant tiredness was a way of life for the soldiers, who usually had no sleep except while they were walking. Sometimes they had only a few minutes in the day for rest.

There was never enough food or heat. The uniforms and shoes wore out too fast. Winters in Russia are very cold. The temperature could go down to 30-40° C. My father came back from the War with frostbitten feet. He had that problem for the rest of his life. Right before his death, he had an operation and his toes were amputated.

World War II brought a lot of distress and breakdown to the whole Russian society. Not one family was untouched by sorrow. The war didn't respect adults or children. There were a lot of disabled veterans and orphans. The country was completely destroyed. Disabled people didn't have any comfortable wheelchairs after the war. They went about on homemade wooden decks, which were constructed on small wheels that often were only some old ball bearings. They pushed them by hand using some wooden blocks. Russia had a terrible experience. More than 22 million people died.

My nephew, Andrey, was a soldier in the Afghanistan war. It was mandatory and he didn't have a choice of shooting or not. He was only eighteen. Andrey had tried to hide the fact that he was at the front in Afghanistan in order to save his parents from distress. His letters went from Tadjikistan, away from the front, as if he were not involved in the war. Andrey's parents didn't know about it until his Commander announced, "Your son has been wounded. A bomb exploded next to him." Andrey lost a lot of time in recuperation. But he is still disabled. Often, headaches torment him. After the Afghanistan war, he studied in college. He became an oil-field technician, but unfortunately the doctors forbade him from working in that field.

Always, war brings mental, emotional and physical pain to folks. Nothing can change a mother's disinclination to give her children over to war. I am against war.

***

"War" is just one of many strong papers written in the spring of '99 by ***Olga Marchenko****. As a student of Joanna Fortna, Olga continually produced descriptive, heartfelt writing. She is currently enrolled in the AutoCAD certificate program at Northern Essex and is aiming toward a career in mechanical design. Olga lives in Methuen with her husband, sons Andrey, 14, and Konstantin, 18, and their dog, Nika.*

The Ambiguity of the Church as a Credible Institution

by Mabel Romero

Religion has been a topic of controversy and disagreement throughout the years, not only because of the diversity of beliefs, but also for the ambiguity of its rules and conditions. In the '90s, churches are supposed to be the home of God, the place to find peace, forgiveness and reconciliation. Apparently, their prophets have forgotten that they should do what they preach.

The idea of a church, in my opinion, would be a place where people get together to share a common belief and a common way of life. This place should be filled with kindness, equality and peace. It also must be the place where everybody can go for support and help in a desperate situation. Unfortunately, that's not necessarily what churches are showing to the world.

Coming from a Catholic school I'd seen a lot of selfishness and discrimination from the Church to the less fortunate people. Catholicism is my religion, so it is the one that I know best. I can make valid my theory based on what I witnessed in my church and in my school.

A congregation of nuns in Barbados founded my school. They had many schools around the world. I started when I was four years old. I stayed there for 14 years. During those years, I saw many acts that go far away from the Catholic principles. Every month, my school asked for obligatory donations that would go to support a little school from a very poor neighborhood in Caracas. At the second year of junior high, we had to go to this school to do some social work. We were in charge of the kids that were falling behind in math and Spanish. I had a lot of fun with those kids.

This school, however, was in very bad condition. The ceilings were made of zinc sheets, so when the sun hit it, the rooms became hot as an oven. The floors and stairs were in such bad condition that we could barely walk on them. It made me wonder, "Where was the money that 1200 girls donated every single month?" My school, on the other hand, was located in one of the best neighborhoods of Caracas, and had renovations every single year. The nuns had brand new cars, and the expenses for receptions and elite events at the school were skyrocketing. This story about my very fancy school could sound like an isolated case of corruption and bad prioritization. However, if you take a look to the highest representation of Catholicism, the Vatican, you could associate it with my school.

Vatican City is, on a larger scale, proof of the negligence and carelessness from the priests toward the problem of world hunger. This city is one of the richest in the world, covered with pure gold from wall to wall! Why don't they sell it and give the money to the people who really need it? A clear example would be the catastrophe that Hurricane Mitch left behind in Central America. I would love to know what the Vatican did about it, other than the Pope's speech asking for help.

Another issue that I really don't understand is the lack of realistic and updated "social rules." We are entering the next millennium, and this institution would rather have unwanted and abandoned kids in the streets than accept the idea that sex is not only for reproduction. In my opinion, sex is the maximum expression of love. It is an amalgamation of two people into one. Maybe I am old fashioned because I don't believe in promiscuity. However, I think that birth control is the best gift you can give to a future baby. There is nothing more Catholic and more beautiful than bringing a desired human being into this world. With its antiquated birth control laws, this church would rather have more unloved and resented people in the world. In consequence, there is more crime, more hate, more violence, because the attitude of an adult begins in the familial environment during his/her childhood.

Now my question is, what should we believe? God is a synonym of love, compassion and caring, regardless of your social position, your ethnicity, or your sexual life. Why does this Church,

that represents God on earth, take our freedom and our power of decision away from us? Why don't church fathers allow us to do this from our hearts, instead of following what a congregation of "human beings" decides? I don't think I would change my religion. I believe and agree with the basic teachings of Christianity, although I hope that the next generation of church representatives will be a little more realistic and a little more human. They must understand that the Bible is only words that we have to follow, but love, compassion and caring for one another are the real actions.

***

Twenty-two-year-old ***Mabel Romero****, a native of Caracas, Venezuela, was a student of Barbara Stachniewicz in the fall of 1998. Although all of her work was written with passionate engagement with her subject, Mabel says that before completing Basic Writing she liked writing but "had a lot of trouble with the language." Now, she feels more confident—a trait she will no doubt carry into her planned career in public relations.*

REG. PRICE
YOU PAY